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By Margaret Talbot

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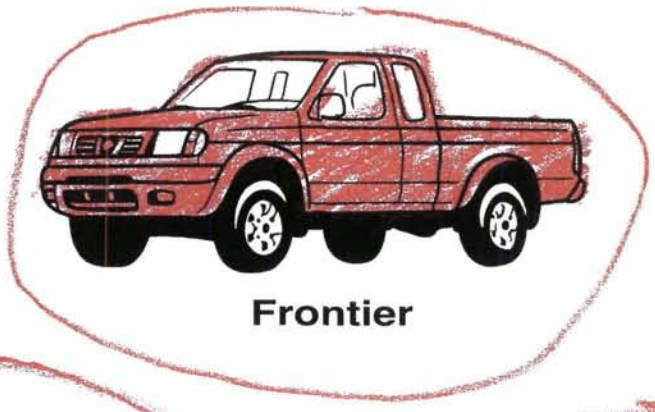

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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JULY 20 & 27, 1998

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CORRESPONDENCE

The Glass affair

To the editors:

I congratulate you for firing Stephen Glass ("To Our Readers," June 1 and "To Our Readers," June 29). It's just unfortunate he was not discovered before you gave him a national venue in which to spread his fictional venom. I knew he was a fraud a year ago after I read your June 9, 1997, cover story, titled "Peddling Poppy," written by Mr. Glass.

The article was about President George Bush. As his chief of staff at that time, I found the article rather amazing. Mr. Glass quoted people who claimed to be close to the president but whom neither I nor anyone else I checked with had ever heard of. (Example: Mary Ung, who said she headed an organization we never heard of, the Committee for the Former President's Integrity.) The article was filled with innuendo, half truths, and complete falsehoods. At no point while writing the article did Mr. Glass call anyone in President Bush's office to either ask for comment or do any fact-checking, which I assume is standard procedure at your magazine.

Unfortunately, I wrote the article off as just another example of very bad journalism and did not call or write to complain. Now I wish I had. I assumed then you would not consider me an objective reader, so you would not listen to what I had to say. But maybe you would have, and Mr. Glass's journalism career would have ended sooner rather than later.

As a very proud graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism and a newspaper reporter for ten years, I find Mr. Glass and his ilk both depressing and frightening. I still consider myself a journalist at heart, but I find it more and more difficult to defend my former profession when it seems rumor and gossip are more important than factual, informative, and legitimate news stories. I can only hope that any other magazine or publication that employs Mr. Glass will follow your lead and give him the boot. The problem with journalism today is much deeper than one arrogant 25-year-old, but you have to start somewhere.

JEAN BECKER
Special Assistant to President Bush
Houston, Texas

To the editors:

Glass doesn't represent poor fact-checking or ingenuousness on your part. Rather, he is a symbol of the depths to which your magazine has sunk during the past decade, especially under the "leadership" of Andrew Sullivan. Character assassination, gossip, and opinion camouflaged as fact have increasingly invaded your pages. Glass got caught, but you lost your honor long ago and don't even know it.

DIANE DANIELLE
Via the Internet

To the editors:

I can't speak for all your readers, but, as for this reader, apology accepted. I have been a subscriber for many years and look forward to more great journalism.

JERRY BRUNS
Via the Internet

To the editors:

I read Mr. Glass's article on hackers and found it charming and, of course, realized that it was a charming spoof. Would you also dismiss Jonathan Swift? I vote in favor of Mr. Glass and hope that I will read his articles again in the pages of THE NEW REPUBLIC.

ARTHUR J. LAFAVE JR.
Cleveland, Ohio

To the editors:

As a subscriber for more than 25 years, I would like to thank Stephen Glass for piercing the bubble of our collective self-importance. His articles had more veracity and insight into current affairs than most of what is published by your magazine, or for that matter any of the dozen other periodicals I read regularly. Instead of being dismissed, he should be given a raise and a regular column.

DANIEL LEVIN
Menlo Park, California

To the editors:

I thought it impossible to hold THE NEW REPUBLIC in any higher regard and esteem for honesty and integrity until I read your mea culpa. There is nothing to forgive and everything to be proud of on your part for taking such an action. Thanks for a renewal of trust in journalism. One might hope that other arms of the media would be so honest if they should encounter such problems of dishonesty with their journalists. You showed a fine example.

FRED KENNEDY
Endwell, New York

To the editors:

First, I applaud you for having the integrity to admit your mistake regarding Stephen Glass's May 18 article, "Hack Heaven." I must admit, however, that I am a bit shocked it took you so long to figure out the fictitious nature of Glass's journalism, and I can't resist jabbing you.

As I read Glass's piece, I assumed the whole thing was concocted. It turned me off so badly that I put down the magazine less than halfway through the article. I asked myself why THE NEW REPUBLIC would publish fiction without identifying it as such, and I assumed you were engaged in some sort of strange new high-brow journalism with the expectation of your readers that they would figure it out on their own.

You have a wonderful magazine, and I look forward to receiving it every week. But perhaps all of you would benefit from a few more editorial trips outside the Beltway. I have felt for a long time that, despite our supposed naïveté, those of us in the Heartland and the rest of the country are not as gullible as you Easterners would think. With the still-wet egg dripping from your faces, my suspicions are gleefully confirmed.

STEVEN P. LILLYBECK
Port Byron, Illinois

To the editors:

Mostly, I appreciated your apology regarding Stephen Glass. One aspect, however, struck a false note. You rightly point out that your fact-checking is not geared toward intentional deceit. Fair enough. But then you go on to say that "Glass mounted what appears to have been quite an elaborate effort . . . to trick our editors and elude our fact-checkers."

You only need to skim "Hack Heaven" to realize the ludicrousness of this statement. The opening bit of dialogue simply could not have happened, and the article is packed way past full with odd names, organizations, and legislation, each begging to be verified. For a guy trying to tiptoe past your fact-checking system, Glass leaves a heavy footprint.

DOUGLAS STONE
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:

In his piece on Alan Greenspan, Glass noted in passing that some investment bankers hire people to attend exhibits and watch shows and brief the investment bankers so that the latter can fake it at cocktail parties. Was that some sort of Freudian slip on Glass's part?

HENRY MA
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

As a reader who is generally very dismayed by the editorial positions taken by TNR, I wish to congratulate you for your forthright and courageous statement regarding your discovery and response to Stephen Glass's fabrications. There is no doubt in my mind about the editorial integrity of TNR. But you begin to indulge in a bit of self-pity when you ask "How could this happen?" What happened had nothing to do with your

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checking procedures, which I am sure are very good. Mr. Glass pulled it off because he knew exactly what you wanted, and he gave it to you. Surely you must know that.

HARRY I. BROWN
Carmel, California

To the editors:
In the June 29 issue of TNR, the table of contents misleadingly describes an editorial, "To Our Readers," as a "report." But the short half-page article buried on pages eight and nine merely lists 23 articles which contain at least "some fabricated material" by associate editor Stephen Glass and then includes a few samples of his fabrications, along with a brief apology and an even briefer explanation.

This retraction, if it can be called that, is entirely inadequate considering the magnitude and gravity of Mr. Glass's lies and the number of individuals or institutions maligned by his inventions. In each and every case where a lie was printed, it should be retracted. I realize that this would take up a great deal of space, but the lies were given a great deal of space when they were published. If you are not willing to do that, then your magazine is irresponsible, and not worth the paper upon which it is printed.

MARTHA G. KING
Murrysville, Pennsylvania

The editors reply:
We were not unwilling to publish the kind of accounting Martha G. King understandably calls for; regrettably, we were unable to do so. Given the profusion of unnamed sources and other untraceable minutiae in Stephen Glass's articles, we found it impossible to determine retrospectively the factuality of every line of his stories with perfect certainty. Our listing represented our best good-faith effort to give readers an indication of which of Glass's stories are not to be trusted, and why—and to do so without risking what would have been the offsetting mistake of purporting to know more than we actually do.

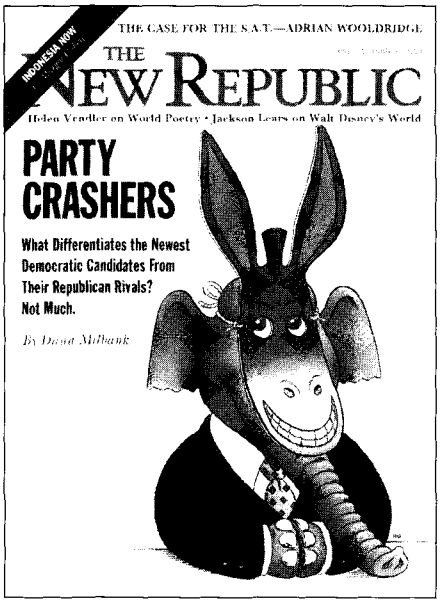
Crashed party

To the editors:
I just finished Dana Milbank's article ("Party Crashers," June 15) regarding the lack of differences between the Democratic candidates and the Republican candidates in the upcoming elections. Great work. Dana is a very welcome addition to your staff of writers. I always look forward to getting TNR each week. Keep up the good work.

JEFF CLARK
Via the Internet

Mortimer replies

To the editors:
I am sorry Martin Peretz ("Habibie's Hour," June 15) thought my *Los Angeles Times* review of Fouad Ajami's *The Dream Palace of the Arabs* was unfavorable. It was not so intended. But perhaps the *Los Angeles Times* was the wrong medium to choose to address Arab intellectuals and urge them to read the book more carefully than they might otherwise be inclined to, given their tendency to regard Professor Ajami as a renegade. It is unfortunately true, however regrettable, that this tendency is strengthened when he boldly and creditably draws attention to his connection with your journal and its publisher.



I am not sure what Mr. Peretz means by his last sentence: "And Mortimer? He has been retained by Kofi Annan as chief speechwriter. It will be interesting to watch the secretary-general's pronouncements for any more flattery of Saddam." I hope Peretz means—and, if he is familiar with any of my writing on Iraq, he must mean—that I am not the sort of person who would encourage flattery of Saddam Hussein in any context.

EDWARD MORTIMER
Foreign Affairs Editor
Financial Times
London, England

Worse ban

To the editors:
In "Bad Ban," (June 15) Nurith C. Aizenman asks, "How can [Congressman Chris] Smith and his allies, people so dedicated to saving unborn life, be so cavalier about reducing funding for family planning just to spite Clinton?"

Smith's crusade against family-planning funds reflects the positions of the leaders of his faith, Roman Catholicism, which is not only opposed to abortion but is equally opposed to contraception. The only "good" way to reduce abortion, according to the Church, is either not to have sex outside marriage or to use a so-called "method" of family planning that involves abstaining from sex for a good part of every month.

Having failed to convince Catholics that this makes sense, the bishops push an anti-family-planning public policy agenda affecting Catholics and non-Catholics alike—lobbying Congress to slash family-planning aid for poor couples here and overseas and to block legislation requiring health insurance coverage of contraception. Of course, they also bar Catholic medical facilities from offering contraceptives or condom counseling to anyone.

All of these positions fly in the face of evidence, such as the Russian experience cited by Aizenman, that access to contraception reduces the need for abortion. With Smith as a reliable water carrier, the bishops have achieved enormous success with an agenda that is not only counterintuitive but tragically counterproductive.

FRANCES KISSLING
President
Catholics For A Free Choice
Washington, D.C.

Bye-bye Barry

To the editors:
As a former D.C. resident, I heartily concur with your editorial ("Barry Bows Out," June 15) celebrating that despicable scoundrel's demise. But you go on to lament the Republican-led Congress's stripping the D.C. mayor's office of its powers. You write: "Barry may have triggered the bizarre overlord power structure, but the city deserves better." Excuse me, but didn't "the city," by which you mean the D.C. electorate, bring this upon itself? By repeatedly voting in a race-baiting, corrupt, spendthrift demagogue as the city's leader, Washingtonians got what they deserved.

ROD DREHER
New York, New York

The editors welcome correspondence from readers. Letters should include the writer's full name, address, and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be held to under 200 words. Letters may be edited for space. Please address letters to: Correspondence, TNR, 1220 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Letters may also be sent electronically to: submissions@tnr.com

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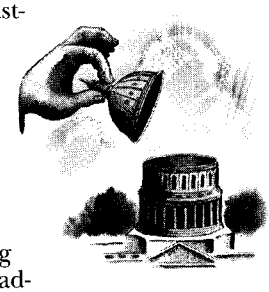
FROM WASHINGTON

Control freaks

Despite the skepticism of pundits ("JIANG'S STUNNING TRIUMPH," declared William Safire in Monday's papers), President Clinton's trip to China has been surprisingly successful, particularly in the context of the administration's desultory human rights record. No doubt Clinton's remarks about the massacre at Tiananmen Square and the universality of human rights were partly a public relations ploy. But, to the extent that the ploy targeted the Chinese populace, and not the American electorate, it counted. Diplomacy and power politics usually revolve more around symbols and prestige than around threats or the actual use of force. Clinton may not have made the case for liberty as an end in itself, but he did stress, pragmatically, that it is essential for stability and economic growth. Far more than American military might or economic sanctions, his defense of human rights struck the Chinese Communist Party at its most vulnerable point: its lack of true political legitimacy.

Yet even Clinton's measured rhetoric about China is more than some foreign policy mavens can stomach. On June 28, one day after the Jiang debate, Robert D. Kaplan, a contributing editor at *The Atlantic Monthly*, published a defense of the June 4, 1989, massacre in Beijing. "Were China to have suddenly become a parliamentary democracy in 1989 at the time of the Tiananmen Square uprising," Kaplan contended in a *New York Times* op-ed, "the average Chinese citizen would likely be worse off today, and dramatically so." Kaplan offered what amounted to the pragmatic case for repression: Without strong central control, Kaplan wrote, China would plunge into ethnic conflict and economic upheaval. Back in 1989, turmoil would have erupted throughout the country, and Russian-style corruption would have flourished. Instead, the country continues to prosper—slowly but safely, weakening the repressive regime and creating the foundation for democracy.

This line of thinking is more than a little counterintuitive—the foreign policy equivalent, you might say, of supply-side economics. (Just as lower tax rates will quickly lead to higher tax receipts, so more repression results in greater freedom.) But it's hardly new territory for Kaplan. In book after book, from *Balkan Ghosts*, which depicted the Yugoslav conflicts as the product of ancient ethnic hatreds, to *The Ends of the Earth*, a tour of various disorderly countries around the globe, Kaplan has purveyed a dark, realist view of the world. Repressive governments, Kaplan seems to believe, can prevent social and political entropy; meanwhile the United States, pursuing what Kaplan has described as a Holocaust-driven foreign policy, foolishly attempts to intervene in various conflicts. Attempts to create democracy too hastily, so the argument goes, only invite conflict.



Kaplan is hardly the only neo-realist making such arguments. His animadversions echo those of such scholars as Harvard's Samuel Huntington, and they have found a receptive audience in the Clinton administration, where, notwithstanding last week's performance, concern for human rights has often taken a back seat to the pursuit of trade. But there have always been serious flaws with this theory—and in few countries are they more conspicuous than China.

Start with Kaplan's notion that the government has created a stable, legalistic environment for trade and growth. Although presented as a cold-eyed view of affairs, it is in fact sentimental because corruption in China is already flourishing—flourishing precisely because authoritarian regimes promote cronyism, not a business climate of openness and accountability. Even a November 1997 editorial in the Chinese Communist Party newspaper, *People's Daily*, acknowledged that "some financial institutions operate in violation of laws and regulations; criminal activities in banking and finance are rampant." As in most of authoritarian-run East Asia, peculation and political influence run rampant in China; a system that lacks democratic checks and balances is, after all, more vulnerable to the rigging of the economic game than a democracy. In essence, the Communist Party and army are not a government; they are institutions, cliques that have hijacked the state for their own purposes. For all the distinctions Kaplan draws between Moscow and Beijing, how different is China really from Yeltsin's state?

This raises a more fundamental, and equally dubious, premise of Kaplan's argument: that China is prospering. Yes, glittering cities such as Shanghai, with their skyscrapers, Mercedes-Benzes, and luxurious hotels, resemble Manhattan—superficially. But even Shanghai is grossly overbuilt and headed for a crash. Leave the southern cities, and you are immediately confronted with horrendous poverty. Adam Smith's lapidary observation still holds true: "The poverty of the lower ranks of people in China far surpasses that of the most beggarly nations in Europe." Consider this: 900 million Chinese live in rural areas, but they account for only slightly more than 40 percent of purchasing power; *China Daily* has noted that the purchasing power of the rural population is "even less than that of the country's 300 million urban residents."

Kaplan maintains that, at bottom, the Chinese regime has managed to do well what repressive regimes always do best: keep social unrest to a minimum. (No surprise there: What is the point of repression if not to repress?) But here, too, Kaplan overreaches. A leading Shanghai economist, Yang Lujun, says that social tensions in the country are far more combustible today than a decade ago. Kaplan insists that this has nothing to do with freedom, since the Chinese people aren't really interested in politics: "they worry about such things as finding a job and a decent place to live." Well, yes. Who doesn't? But how well is Kaplan's favorite authoritarianism performing in that regard? *Grant's Asia Observer* reports that unemployment may go as high as 15 million to 18 million in 1999 as the government seeks to close down unprofitable state-owned enterprises.

Kaplan's underlying premise—that economic well-being is an end in itself distinct from (and in some ways superior to) political freedom—is looking increasingly threadbare as various countries that touted "Asian values" in opposition to American ones suddenly go belly-up economically. Liberty can precede prosperity, but prosperity does not necessarily precede liberty. A Gulag, a *Laogai*, is not the prerequisite for freedom and wealth. Fortunately, President Clinton seems to have grasped the value of that message—at least for the moment.

JACOB HEILBRUNN

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JULY 20 & 27, 1998

ANTI-EXPRESSIONISM

As exercises in unapologetic judicial policymaking, the three sexual harassment decisions that the Supreme Court handed down last week can rival *Roe* v. *Wade* for brazenness. But, if the Court is determined to legislate a national code of sexual harassment, at least the Court could legislate pragmatically. In two of its three decisions, however, the Court was defiantly unpragmatic, refusing to acknowledge the costs of the harassment policies it has imposed on American workplaces by judicial fiat.

The first of the three decisions, *Gebser* v. *Lago Vista Independent School District*, represents the most important, and most welcome, change in harassment law. On behalf of a divided Court, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor held that federally funded schools and universities aren't liable for a teacher's sexual harassment of a student unless officials actually know about the conduct and refuse to intervene. This is an occasion for the friends of free expression to celebrate. Even legal scholars who generally support expansive sexual harassment laws in the workplace recognize the dangers of imposing the same standards on schools and universities. If schools were held vicariously liable for the sexually charged conduct of their teachers, they would have a powerful incentive to ban not only sexual abuse but also any speech that could be considered sexually offensive. The result would be a serious inhibition of the free exchange of ideas.

In a dissenting opinion in the *Gebser* case, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg suggested that schools should be presumptively liable for the harassment of teachers unless they have adopted "an effective policy for reporting and redressing such misconduct" that the student unreasonably failed to invoke. But, in the twelve years since the Supreme Court recognized sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination, prudent administrators and employers, in an effort to avoid liability, have invariably adopted harassment policies that suppress far more speech than the law itself forbids. By reducing the pressure on school administrators to regulate the free expression of students and teachers, the majority decision has narrowly rejected one of the most serious challenges to academic freedom in a generation.

Alas, in the two other harassment decisions, *Burlington Industries* v. *Ellerth* and *Faragher* v. *City of Boca Raton*, seven justices increased the legal pressure on private employers to adopt harassment policies in the workplace. The Court held that employers should be vicariously liable for the "hostile environments" created by their supervisors. However, employers can defend themselves two ways: first, by showing that they "exercised reasonable care to prevent or correct promptly any sexually harassing behavior," by adopting a sexual harassment policy, for example; and, second, by showing that the offended employee "unreasonably failed to take advantage of any preventative or corrective opportunities provided by the employer."

The *Ellerth* and *Faragher* decisions have been hailed by employers, who are relieved to know what the law requires; by sensitivity trainers, who will now become ubiquitous in the workplace; and by civil rights advocates, who have an ideological investment in expanding the definition of sexual harassment as much as possible. But there is a far broader constituency that is bound to suffer under the new harassment regime: American workers. Under the new rules, even a company that has adopted an expansive anti-harassment policy risks liability as soon as an offended worker files a complaint. To protect themselves from ruinous damages, therefore, companies will face increasing pressure to ensure that their policies are effective in preventing anything that might possibly provoke a complaint. This means adopting something close to a zero-tolerance policy for sexual expression. And, in a society whose citizens spend most of their time at work, free expression more generally will suffer.

"'Simple teasing,' offhand comments, and isolated incidents (unless extremely serious) will not amount to discriminatory changes in the 'terms and conditions of employment,'" Justice Souter emphasized in his opinion for the Court in the *Faragher* case. But, even though an offhand comment from a single employee may not be illegal, a pattern of comments from differ-

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ent employees could indeed create a hostile environment. To decrease the risk of liability, therefore, prudent companies will increasingly be moved to fire their least-valued employees and supervisors for stray comments and sexually suggestive e-mails. The Court stresses that companies can avoid liability in cases where employees fail to invoke the complaint procedures. But, because liability is almost automatic as soon as a complaint is filed, employees who seek generous settlements have an incentive not to complain until *after* the offensive conduct becomes severe and pervasive enough to be actionable. This incentive is especially perverse in light of evidence suggesting that the best way to stop harassment is simply to ask the harasser to stop.

In his powerful dissenting opinions in the employment harassment cases, Justice Thomas, joined by Justice Scalia, accurately predicted the costs of the new regime. "Sexual harassment is simply not something that employers can wholly prevent without taking extraordinary measures—constant video and audio surveillance, for example—that would revolutionize the workplace in a manner incompatible with a free society," Thomas wrote. Thomas would put the burden on the employee to prove that the employer hadn't taken reasonable steps to prevent harassment. Under Thomas's proposed standard, too, employers would have an incentive to adopt anti-harassment policies, but they would face less pressure to root out all sexual banter.

Despite its clarification of the rules governing liability in harassment cases, the Court has continued to refuse to clarify the definition of sexual harassment itself. The facts of the *Ellerth* case have been compared to those alleged by Paula Jones, for example; but the new decisions cast no useful light on the merits of the Jones case. The *Ellerth* decision makes clear that Paula Jones can't claim she was the victim of quid pro quo sexual harassment because (as Judge Susan Webber Wright held in dismissing Jones's complaint) she didn't suffer any tangible setback to her career as a result of resisting the purported harasser's advances. Yet the justices pointedly failed to say whether or not they think a single offensive encounter can be "extreme" enough to qualify as "hostile environment" harassment.

In its woodenly formalistic opinion in *Clinton* v. *Jones*, the Court wrongly predicted the president wouldn't be unduly burdened by the demands of a sexual harassment suit. Having witnessed the limits of their practical understanding of harassment law in that case, the justices might have attempted to tread gingerly before presuming to expand the rules whose effects they so recently miscalculated. Alas, the Court has compounded its original error by exaggerating the benefits of anti-harassment policies and willfully refusing to acknowledge their costs. Perhaps we, too, will be proved to be poor prophets, but we think American citizens will come to regret the transformation of the workplace that the Supreme Court's overconfident decisions have helped to precipitate. •

NOTEBOOK

ROTH GOES: The Holocaust Museum Follies continue. This time the tempest was provoked by the appointment of John Roth, a professor of philosophy at Claremont McKenna College in California, to be director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the Museum. Roth is a decent man and a scholar who has written many books on the Holocaust in its historical and philosophical dimensions, and in the Holocaust community (it sounds obscene, but it is all around us) he is well respected. Enter Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America and self-appointed keeper of the orthodoxy on all subjects Jewish and Israel-related. Klein discovered that in some op-ed pieces in the 1980s Roth was the author of some stupid sentences, in which the election of Ronald Reagan put him in mind of the rise of Hitler, and the preference of the extreme right-wing Moledet party in Israel for the "transfer" of Palestinians put him in mind of *Kristallnacht* and the treatment of Jews in Germany in the 1930s. Klein faxed the offending passages to the relevant conservative congressman on the Museum's council, Roth apologized, the storm winds blew, Roth withdrew his name. A victory for truth? Hardly. There are a number of things that need to be said. First, that the analogy between Moledet and fascism is not far-fetched. Second, that Roth's progressivism is very un-deep and unreflective for a man who has devoted himself to deep reflection. Third, that the political game (for that is what it is) of digging in people's occasional writings for embarrassments is repugnant. John Roth's many books are anything but ugly; and let us have a look at every single one of Morton Klein's words! Fourth, that the appointment of Roth was a perfectly defensible and perfectly undistinguished appointment. He has written millions of decent words about the excruciations of the Jews, but who outside the Holocaust community knows or cares about any of them? He turns out to be a fine emblem of the professionalization and the routinization of Holocaust Studies, and *that* is a depressing spectacle indeed. For the shock is gone; and, when the shock is gone, the memory is only a subject, a career. At least the shock still lives for the millions of people who visit the heartbreaking galleries of this remarkable institution, and not even its leadership can find a way to get in its way.

SAY YOUR PRAYERS: Mildred Rosario was recently fired as a teacher from a New York City public school for violating the separation of church and state. Specifically, Rosario led her sixth-grade students in prayer and asked "if anyone would like to accept Jesus as their savior." Now Rosario has become a martyr of the religious right. "This woman is an ideal, not a criminal," said Gary Bauer, who heads the Family Research Council. "We need countless teachers like this." House Majority Whip Tom DeLay chimed in: "What was wrong with bringing

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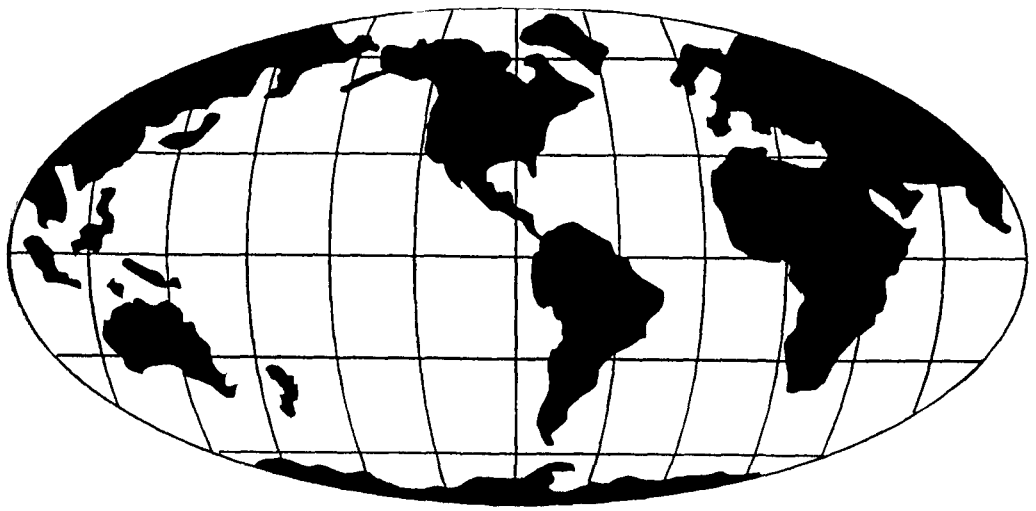

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that kind of message to children?" Well, among other things, it's a blatant violation of everything conservatives have purported to believe about school prayer. Until now, they have insisted that the last thing they want is to make the public schools a forum for religious proselytizing. Amending the Constitution to permit school prayer, they soothingly emphasize, would merely allow voluntary, nonsectarian, student-led praying. They carefully avoid endorsing scenarios that involve, say, teachers asking students to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Indeed, they have said all along that such scenarios are figments of the liberal secularist imagination. This hypocritical outpouring of support for Rosario is going to hurt Bauer and DeLay's own cause. Too bad they didn't just pause for a moment of silence.

ULSTERIOR MOTIVES:

ULSTER VOTE PUTS THE PACT AT RISK

—*The New York Times*, June 27, 1998

Voting promotes peace in Ulster

—*The Berkshire Eagle*, same day

(Thanks to Dr. Aaron H. Esman of New York, New York.) •

THE HARD QUESTIONS

DISUNITED

By Michael Walzer

I recently spent three weeks in Germany and France—in the very center of Europe-to-be. In Frankfurt, a city of banks, all the bank windows feature a handsome poster showing the design of the new euro. The bills have a map on one side, an architectural design on the other. They have no faces, and this absence is, perhaps, their most important symbolism. Most of the people I talked with—Social Democrats, Greens, left academics, and liberal members of the different religious communities—are good Europeans. This is especially so in Germany, where the left, and many members of the Christian Democratic center, too, see the European Union as a permanent constraint on German nationalism. But I also found a lot of anxiety about the fate of democracy in the emerging union—a fear of the facelessness of Europe's new rulers.

In its modern versions, democracy is a political regime specifically for nation-states. That was the setting for all the revolutions and popular mobilizations that produced universal suffrage, political rights, and accountable government; none of these have existed in any other setting. There is as yet no effective transnational democracy in Europe or anywhere else—no Euro-wide parties, for example (despite the once-vaunted "internationalism" of social democracy), and no decision-making agencies that are responsible to a Euro-wide electorate.

Representatives to the European Parliament are chosen in what are essentially national elections. But the body has no substantial legislative powers: It can resolve but it cannot enact. It conducts hearings and investigations, and it has issued—so I was told—some useful reports. But it can't be said to control the Brussels bureaucracy, nor will it control the officials of the European bank soon to be established in Frankfurt.

European democracy, then, is indirect. The bureaucrats and bankers are responsible to the various heads of state (or to the most powerful among them), and the heads of state are responsible, in turn, to their various national electorates. But many people in those electorates, and probably some heads of state, too, feel that they are being forced to submit to policy decisions, particularly with regard to the economy, that they had no part in making and cannot effectively resist. A couple of years ago, I met the newly elected socialist prime minister of one of the smaller European states. I asked him what it felt like to come to power and rule a country. He described a budget-making process largely dictated from Brussels and concluded, "One doesn't rule a country these days; one relates to it."

Can democracy work beyond the nation-state? The truth is that we have virtually no experience from which to address this question. The founding of the American union isn't a useful model; there isn't going to be a United States of Europe. What made possible a strong federal government in the U.S.—and a politics that transcended the 13 states—was the relative homogeneity of the American people (given the exclusion of the Indian nations and the black slaves). But Europe consists of radically heterogeneous peoples, each of which is territorially based, of ancient standing, speaks a different language, and has a long history of self-government. Sovereignty may be eroded over time; that process is well begun. But it won't be conceded en bloc. And so democratic politics in the ordinary sense, the open competition of parties and leaders, will remain national in character while Euro-wide decision-making will continue to take place largely out of public view.

All of which is reason to worry about European union but not to oppose it. The bureaucrats and bankers are Marxists of a sort. They seem to think that politics follows economics—the euro is the key to Europe. If they are right, the gradual Europeanization of political society should follow as a response to an increasingly Europeanized

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economy. I would guess that the members of Europe's Socialist, Social Democratic, and Labor parties are already starting to meet regularly; the Christian Democratic conservatives and center-right parties will presumably do the same; the Greens, too. These different groupings won't compete for power together, but they can at least coordinate their party programs.

It is especially important that labor unions from different countries aim at common policies. Since capital is already transnational, its requirements are well looked after by the faceless bankers. But the conditions and remuneration of work are still, despite Europe's "social charter," local issues. The recent strike at Air France suggests the difficulties of labor coordination—the French pilots, before their strike began, earned more than the pilots of any other European airline. Without coordination, however, workers won't have much to say about crucial economic decisions. Only elite groups, like the pilots, can still win local victories.

The new social movements reach across the old borders, though with what effectiveness is not yet clear. French and German feminism certainly look very different, not only in cultural style, but also in policy substance. I am not sure that feminists from the two countries even read one another's writings.

Indeed, language may be the crucial obstacle to the formation of an all-European political public. There are as yet no genuinely European newspapers or magazines. The *International Herald Tribune* probably comes closest, even if its articles and editorials are drawn from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, not from *Le Monde* or *La Stampa* or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. There is now a Euro-public (even if some of its members are Euro-skeptics), but this public hardly extends beyond the policy elites. Hence the importance of parties and movements that bring ordinary men and women into the crucial debates—and let them know that they have been brought in. Ultimately, however, there won't be a coherent political society until its various organizations find a visible institutional focus—and what can that be? A real parliament? A Euro-cabinet?

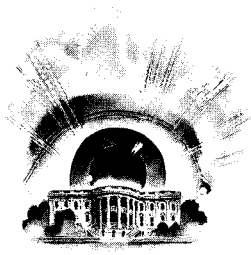
Europe has been a top-down project, and its success has probably depended on that. For the immediate political losers are the citizen voters of each of the countries who've seen their sovereignty erode. Now Europe has to become a bottom-up project, too, so that this loss can be redeemed and democratic politics can find an all-European home. Whether this is possible I don't know, but the dangers of failure are plain to see. There are already nationalist politicians in every European country, mostly but not only on the right, trying to create, or exploit, popular resentment against the faceless bureaucrats and bankers. Nobody that I spoke with had a sure answer to these local, possibly nasty, nationalisms. Somehow European politics will have to be provided with ... what? Not a lone accountable face—that's not possible or, for that matter, desirable. But something like what representative democracy has always required: a set of accountable faces. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

THE DEPUTY

By Dana Milbank

Maria Echaveste, who begins work as the president's new deputy chief of staff on July 7, doesn't do things halfway. When the daughter of Mexican migrant farm workers married a Jewish New Yorker, she converted to Judaism—over the objections of some in her family—in an Orthodox synagogue. "I haven't had a cheeseburger in years," she reports. Echaveste chose Orthodoxy, she says, so that there would be no doubts about her children's Jewishness. Now she's getting divorced, and she doesn't have kids—but Echaveste is keeping the faith. "I'm looking for a nice Jewish guy," she says over a Diet Coke in her office, which looks like a funeral parlor because of the congratulatory flowers she's gotten since her promotion.



Echaveste is, in short, what Clinton tries so hard to be: all things to all people. Actually, Echaveste practically *is* all people, the sort of one-woman band of diversity even the president couldn't have expected to find when he promised an administration that looks more like America. She's a Hispanic woman, a Jew, a corporate lawyer, a Californian, a Texan, a New Yorker, a marathon runner, and a gardener. Oh, yes, she also knits. If only she were a veteran and a retired soy farmer, the White House's pollsters wouldn't need focus groups any more.

After spending Clinton's first term in the Labor Department, Echaveste, 44, moved to a rather predictable spot in the administration: director of the White House Office of Public Liaison. OPL, as it is called, is in charge of "outreach" to minority and interest groups. It's essentially a constituent service operation, in charge of the care and feeding of groups that have been kind to Clinton. But Echaveste turned the sleepy office into a policy shop. Her get-ahead technique irked some on her staff and raised eyebrows elsewhere in the White House, but it landed her the job she has now. Before her promotion, she was rumored as the next education secretary if Richard Riley departed.

Echaveste's promotion, officials say, will likely bring a rise in the influence of minority and interest groups in White House decision-making. "She understands the guts of that better than we ever had, and she'll be able to take the lead in that area," says a top administration

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official. To critics, it means giving too much say to interest groups in a White House that already resembles one big Office of Public Liaison; to fans, it's giving a voice to the voiceless. Either way, with Echaveste near the top of the White House structure, even more such customer-friendliness is sure to follow. And she may gain seniority quickly. Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles is again thinking about leaving—possibly even before November—and one of those hoping to replace him is John Podesta, Clinton's other deputy chief of staff.

To get an idea of what's in store, take a look at what Echaveste has done already to raise the Hispanic presence in White House policymaking. After the 1996 election, in which Latino support of Clinton rose to 72 percent from 60 percent in 1992, the president wanted to reward that support and consolidate a new Democratic constituency. High-profile promotions were one way to do it. But the highest-ranking Hispanic in the White House was Janet Murguia, the deputy in the legislative shop. So Clinton hired two at the senior "assistant to the president" rank: Echaveste and, to lead the White House's intergovernmental office, Mickey Ibarra, who handled Latino efforts in the '96 campaign. They formed an unofficial Hispanic triumvirate: Murguia, a first-generation Mexican-American, would coordinate with the Hispanic Caucus on Capitol Hill; Ibarra, whose father left Mexico to pick fruit in the U.S., would speak for Hispanic state officeholders; and Echaveste would represent leaders of Latino interest groups.

Echaveste, speaking for the triumvirate, then demanded a role in deliberations at OMB, NEC, NSC, DPC, and the rest of the White House's policymaking alphabet soup. She attends meetings of the Domestic Policy Council at least once a day, a DPC official says. At first, her colleagues would look at her and say, "Why are you here?" "Maria felt strongly it was necessary to upgrade the policy interaction with the White House," says Ibarra, whose West Wing office has a photo of a campaign ad ("Ten Reasons Why Hispanics Should Vote to Re-elect President Clinton") signed "*Muchas Gracias*" from Al Gore. Adds Murguia: "The White House is a big place, but the circle of decision-making is very small. We've been trying to crack into policymaking."

Today, their fingerprints are visible on several of Clinton's second-term efforts. Though the president had promised to restore benefits to legal immigrants who were cut off under the 1996 welfare law, some in the White House saw no hope of reopening the debate. But Echaveste, with Ibarra and Murguia, pushed for a mention of the issue in Clinton's January 1998 State of the Union address. The early draft of the speech had no mention of the benefits. Finally, at Clinton's rehearsal in the White House movie theater just before the address, Echaveste and Murguia appealed directly to the chief. Clinton agreed; Congress has since restored food stamps.

Echaveste also wrestled with Domestic Policy Adviser Bruce Reed and his DPC for several weeks over the president's response to California's ballot initiative ending bilingual education. Though Reed agreed the president should oppose the measure, he wanted Clinton to endorse the idea of a fixed period during which schools must teach students English or face penalties. Murguia and Ibarra opposed such a time limit, and Echaveste haggled with the DPC until they agreed on a three-year "goal" for learning English, without penalties. The measure, Proposition 227, passed anyway. But, Ibarra says, "this is one more issue where the Latino community understands the president is on their side."

Similarly, Echaveste took charge of some White House immigration policy. Under a 1996 law, Central Americans who came illegally during the 1980s were in danger of being deported. Deputized by Clinton, Echaveste called meetings with the DPC, the INS, the White House counsel's office, and the legislative office to coordinate a strategy on the Hill. The administration persuaded Republicans to protect Guatemalans and Salvadorans from deportation, in addition to Nicaraguans, whom the GOP already planned to protect. Lately, Echaveste has stretched her "public liaison" duties even further, leaping into the bankruptcy reform debate. Arguing that the reform could hurt women and children, she's pushed the White House to oppose a provision that would prohibit credit card debt from being forgiven.

Echaveste drew criticism early on and some unfavorable comparisons with her predecessor, Alexis Herman, now labor secretary. The soft-spoken Herman, revered by her staff, preferred the traditional care-and-feeding function, so much so that she got into trouble during the campaign finance scandal for the people she brought through the White House. Echaveste, by comparison, was seen as an abrasive micromanager. Unlike Herman, she was a permanent fixture at the twice-weekly staff meetings, and she chastised the staff when she heard grumbling about her management. Echaveste's successor, Minyon Moore, says she's looking for a "creative blend" of the two opposite approaches.

Echaveste's ethnicity and her gender have led some in the White House to believe that her elevation is due to affirmative action. (She replaces another woman, Sylvia Mathews, who becomes the deputy director of OMB.) For her part, Echaveste, educated at Stanford and Berkeley, doesn't plan to dwell solely on minority themes. "That's the best way to insure that you're marginalized," she says. She hasn't yet carved up duties with Podesta, but she says she has plans to work on education and the environment, while also dabbling in foreign policy (Latin America and Africa are her chief interests). But, just as surely, Echaveste plans to devote herself to the issues that brought her to the job: the president's race initiative, affirmative action, and a range of immigration issues. And she plans to amplify the voices of minority groups in the sanctum sanctorum. "If people are trying to make decisions on policy matters, and you're not at the proverbial table saying here's how the constituencies feel about this, you're making policy decisions in a vacuum," she says. If Clinton begins to sound a bit more like the interest groups that put him where he is, you'll know Maria Echaveste has prevailed again. •

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ON THE HILL

NOBLE'S CAUSE

By Nurith C. Aizenman

Lawrence Noble may be the most unpopular man in Washington. It's not that he isn't accessible or friendly—on the contrary, he couldn't be more down-to-earth. It's just that Noble also happens to be general counsel of the Federal Election Commission. That makes him the chief bureaucrat in charge of prosecuting campaign finance violations by everyone from politicians, to major corporations, to labor unions, to ideological activists—in short, by anyone who's anyone in American politics. After eleven years on the job, and almost 21 years at the FEC, Noble has gotten use to the slippery maneuvers and hardball tactics of the people he regulates. "Not a lot surprises me in Washington," he chuckles. But even Noble was astonished to learn that some of his adversaries in the Republican Party may actually try to oust him through an act of Congress.

At first glance, the provision in question seems like just another bureaucratic reform. It would simply require that every four years a majority of the FEC's six commissioners (who are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate) vote to reappoint the agency's general counsel and staff director. However, at present, both officials serve indefinitely unless a majority of the commissioners vote to *remove* them. So, in effect, the measure would reduce the number of votes required to fire the general counsel or staff director from four to three. This is significant because three of the commissioners are always Republicans and three are Democrats, and they tend to vote along party lines. At any given time, Noble is invariably recommending action that adversely affects the interests of at least one of the two parties. Thus, as Noble puts it, "the joke around here is that there have always been three votes to remove me, but they haven't been the same three votes."

Republican supporters of the proposal deny that it has anything to do with Noble personally. "This is not about that guy raising so much hell at the FEC—I forget his name, starts with an 'N,'" says House Appropriations Chairman Bob Livingston, who introduced the proposal a few weeks ago at the suggestion of Representative Bill Thomas. "This is basically a good-government initiative." But the Republicans don't exactly hide their contempt for Noble—and they've never been shy when it comes to attacking the agency he represents.

Indeed, if Livingston's proposal passes, it will represent only the latest in a series of Republican assaults on the FEC. Although the famously beleaguered agency has always had a hard time getting Congress to disgorge funding, things really got ugly after the Republicans gained control of Congress in 1994. One of the GOP's first moves was to take back $1.5 million that Congress had already appropriated to the FEC for that year—forcing the agency to announce a hiring freeze even as its staff struggled to sort through an explosion of campaign spending. The Republicans have since increased the FEC's budget, but much of that money has been earmarked for computers, not staff.

As a result, the FEC—long criticized by reformers for not pursuing enough cases of alleged wrongdoing—has cut back even further. Today, it dismisses about two-thirds of the compliance matters before it, largely on the grounds that it only has the resources to pursue the worst infractions. Livingston cites this as proof that the FEC is "a worthless commission"—"it's gotten to the point where maybe [the FEC] should be abolished." But it's clear that his real concern is not so much with what the agency isn't doing as with what it is doing.

And what it is doing, the Republicans say, is targeting them unfairly. Republicans tick off some recent high-profile cases—a zealous (and ultimately unsuccessful) prosecution of Newt Gingrich's GOPAC, an ongoing suit against the Christian Coalition for alleged coordination with the GOP—and then wonder why Democrats haven't been hit with similar investigations. "You have the DNC returning millions in donations [from the 1996 campaign]," says Livingston aide Mark Curollo, "and there's not a peep about it from the FEC."

To be sure, Noble has a distinctly liberal political pedigree. A native of Queens, New York, he went to college in the late '60s and early '70s. "There was a lot of upheaval and turmoil and issues," he remembers. "I decided at that point that I wanted to try to do something in the public interest. I wasn't going to be a bomb-throwing radical, so law school seemed like the way to go." Noble's first job was a stint with a Ralph Nader group focused on the airline industry. From there, he headed to the newly created FEC, where he's been ever since.

Nonetheless, it's hard to find evidence of bias in the FEC caseload. At Noble's behest, the FEC has targeted plenty of liberals, too—including the National Organization for Women and Public Citizen. By the commission staff's count, Democrats have generally accounted for a little over half of the cases that Noble has pursued involving either party. And, though Noble is prohibited by law from either confirming or denying whether the FEC is currently investigating the DNC, when asked about Curollo's charge, Noble emphasizes that "we do have investigations ongoing involving all the major issues of the '96 elections." Perhaps most importantly, the same clumsy oversight structure that makes it hard for the FEC to go after cases also makes

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it nearly impossible to use the agency to pursue a partisan agenda. After all, Noble cannot prosecute a case unless he gets approval from at least four of the six commissioners, meaning that commissioners of both parties must agree with him.

But just as irritating to Republicans as their perception—however misguided—that Noble has a political bias are Noble's broad interpretations of campaign finance law. Among the philosophical issues over which Noble and the Republicans (and, to be sure, many Democrats) have butted heads is the question of what qualifies as "express advocacy" of a political candidate. This is important because, whereas the law restricts or prohibits many groups—most notably corporations and labor unions—from spending money on ads that "expressly advocate" a candidate, the First Amendment guarantees their right to spend as much as they want on ads that merely advance their views on a particular "issue."

The Supreme Court has laid out a definition of express advocacy that includes—but is not necessarily limited to—the use of magic words like "vote for" or "Smith for Congress." But, in subsequent rulings, lower courts have disagreed over how broadly to interpret this decision. At Noble's recommendation the FEC has adopted, and stuck with, the most sweeping of these definitions—and the Republicans and allied conservative groups have responded with a flurry of lawsuits.

Similar clashes have erupted over soft money—the unregulated contributions that go almost entirely to parties rather than candidates. Under original FEC regulations, the parties could spend only hard money—that is, the money raised under the strict limitations of the campaign finance law—to influence federal elections. However, the FEC has since recognized that some party spending, for instance money spent on get-out-the-vote drives, also influences state elections. So, after much deliberation, the FEC issued a rule allowing both state and national parties to finance a portion of these activities with soft money. The result is a loophole through which corporations and labor unions have funneled huge sums to national parties—and, by extension, to national candidates. Since the mid-1980s the amount of soft money contributed through this system has ballooned. During the 1995–1996 election cycle the two parties raised over $250 million dollars in soft money. Much of this money was then spent by the parties on so-called "issue ads"—ads ostensibly about the issues exclusively, but that just happened to mention candidates like Bill Clinton or Bob Dole.

In a recent recommendation to the commissioners, Noble has argued that what the FEC created, it can also destroy. If the current rules "appear to be allowing the national party committees to use large soft money contributions in ways that unavoidably influence federal elections," he wrote, then it may be not only possible but also necessary to change them. This has incensed the Republicans—and quite a few Democrats—who see Noble's proposals as an attempt to expand campaign finance laws into unconstitutional territory.

Of course, the proposal is only Noble's recommendation. He must convince at least four of the six commissioners to go along with him before it becomes a binding regulation, and at this point he's had to work hard to get a majority to authorize him to offer his latest draft version even for public comment. But Noble's recommendations have certainly gotten the Republicans' attention—and, in this political climate, that may be enough to seal his fate. After all, his ideas regarding both express advocacy and soft money are remarkably similar to those in the McCain-Feingold and Shays-Meehan bills—proposals the Republicans have all but killed. Getting rid of Lawrence Noble and his pesky recommendations would put the final nail in the coffin of campaign finance reform.

It's hard to say whether Livingston and company will succeed. While Senate Republicans are considering introducing a similar measure of their own, campaign reform advocates like Russ Feingold have vowed to fight such a move. Meanwhile, in the House, Carolyn Maloney has drafted an amendment to remove the provision once the bill hits the House floor.

As for Lawrence Noble, he'll keep forging ahead. "I can't say I ever sat down and said this is what I want to retire from. But, as long as what we're doing is important and as long as we're struggling to make the system better," he says he'll keep at it. "This has been an excellent job." Of course, he adds, "if Congress sends a message that it wants a general counsel that will not step on anyone's toes, then I'm not sure that's the job I want." •

Facing the legacy of Tiananmen.

CHINA CLOSET

By Robert A. Manning

In a summit long on bonhomie and political theater, but short on substance, there was just one issue neither Bill Clinton nor Jiang Zemin could conjure away: the June 4, 1989, massacre known on the streets of China as "6–4." The bloodshed at Tiananmen remains part of the complex legacy that the late Deng Xiaoping bequeathed to Jiang. Jiang enjoys the buoyant prosperity made possible, in large part, by Deng's economic reforms. But he suffers from the damage to the regime's political legitimacy done by Deng's decision to send in the troops. And Tiananmen still plagues the U.S.-China relationship—a relationship that can never be as smooth as Beijing wants it to be as long as CNN's

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searing images of tracer bullets in the night and tanks in the streets remain etched on the American psyche. Earnest Clintonian proclamations of "partnership" and the laudably frank human rights repartee between Clinton and Jiang notwithstanding, the stigma of Tiananmen (and all it represents) remains.

Why, then, can't Chinese leaders openly reassess the bloody events of nine years ago? It's not as if no one has suggested that they do so. On the eve of the Clinton-Jiang summit, no less a figure than Zhao Ziyang issued an open letter challenging his former comrades to reverse the official verdict on the 1989 events. During the heady days of the mid-1980s, Zhao was a member of Deng Xiaoping's inner circle. He helped shape and implement Deng's initial economic and legal reforms and harbored intriguing plans for political reform. But, when he appeared to side with the protestors in Tiananmen, Zhao was cast into political disgrace.

Shortly before Clinton arrived, Zhao resurfaced, bearing the message that "the United States and the whole of the West have again and again raised the June 4 problem and the human rights problem in China. Rather than let it become an obstacle to international relations, it would be better to resolve the June 4 problem ourselves." Echoing Zhao's call for contrition and democracy, former Central Committee member Bao Tong, Zhao's longtime senior adviser, broke his long silence, too, telling the foreign press that "political reform is the biggest issue in China today. It begins with June 4."

Not only is Zhao's advice morally sound, but some in China's ruling elite would agree (in private, at least) that they need a way to remove the burden of 6–4, albeit for their own reasons. The People's Liberation Army, for example, might well favor a reappraisal of 6–4. Why? As I learned in recent conversations with Chinese defense officials, the PLA feels it has unfairly borne the blame for what was, in the end, a political decision to use force. The PLA wants it to be clear that they were mere instruments of policy, doing a soldier's job. Though he has mouthed the party line on Tiananmen himself, Jiang Zemin might also have an interest in adjusting the official story, since it obliges him to defend decisions made by others.

But, for Jiang and his colleagues, other matters of self-interest continue to take precedence. Chief among them is the fear that an honest look back could spiral out of control. It was not just Li Peng, the hard-liner who was prime minister at the time of Tiananmen, but a host of other officials who defended the decision to use force. However cathartic it would be, many Chinese, and not just those in the party, would fear such an open-ended reappraisal as a prescription for *luan*—chaos.

Instead, the current leadership tries to work around the edges of the issue, addressing many of the grievances that helped fuel the Tiananmen protests, but deferring full accountability. For now, they believe their approach is working. One sign of this was the very fact that Jiang and his colleagues felt secure enough to give Clinton more access to the Chinese people. The Chinese government gave its people more television and radio coverage of Clinton than the Chinese usually see of their own leaders. Indeed, well before Clinton arrived, discussions of human rights and democracy had surfaced in Chinese intellectual journals and on campuses in another "Beijing Spring." (To be sure, in the past, such thaws have been cyclical: Mao's Hundred Flowers campaign in the 1950s gave way to the horrors of the Great Leap Forward; the 1979 Democracy Wall period ended with Deng's jailing of recently released dissident Wei Jingsheng.)

The latitude given Clinton was also a measure of the changes that have occurred since 1989. Virtually all of the leaders with whom Clinton met had no direct role in the Tiananmen crackdown. The paramount authority, Deng Xiaoping, is dead, and Li Peng has been politically pushed aside. Both Jiang and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, Beijing's master technocrat, served as mayor of cosmopolitan Shanghai in the difficult years around Tiananmen. They got promoted in part for handling Shanghai's protests without violence.

Beijing's tolerance of Clinton's media show also suggests that China's leaders feel that high economic growth has offset public unhappiness over political repression. (And, to be sure, many of the Tiananmen protesters were reacting to such problems as nepotism, corruption, and inflation more than they were demanding democracy as such.) For China's growing middle class, getting rich is a ubiquitous preoccupation. The problem for the government, however, is to sustain the boom amid the broader Asian economic crisis.

Of late, Beijing has been focused on the next phase of economic modernization: privatizing state-owned enterprises, reforming banks (bad loans total about a third of China's GNP), and weaving a new social safety net. It's unclear whether China will be able to fix all of these enormous problems without social disruption. The state-owned enterprises absorb nearly 60 percent of investment and are thus a major factor in the banking system's woes. Massive downsizing is necessary. But, since the state-owned enterprises employ and provide social services to nearly two-thirds of the urban workforce, and since China has no other social safety net, the government's efforts to fix the enterprises will impose short-term pain on millions. A recent report by the National Defense University, *Strategic Trends in China*, warns that slower Chinese growth "could produce an increase in already high levels of social discontent which could result in political instability."

And this is where the Tiananmen factor reenters the calculus. While I was in China prior to Jiang's U.S. visit last fall, senior Chinese sources made it clear to me that the top leadership continues to wrestle with the question of how to move toward "reversing the verdicts" on 6–4. The leaders know that truth about the past is indispensable to their hopes of fully regaining the "Mandate of Heaven"—the Confucian stamp of political legitimacy that could help insulate them from the potential discontent to come. Yet they continue to fear the consequences of reappraising Tiananmen at a time when millions face unemployment. They especially don't want

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to legitimize independent labor unions that could lead a worker revolt against the Communist Party. This is the impulse behind such acts as the roundup of dissidents during Clinton's trip.

Until the Chinese leadership finds a way out of this trap it has set for itself, the legacy of Tiananmen will continue to limit China's relations with the U.S. An official "reversal of the verdicts" would go a long way toward altering American perceptions of China's political character and intentions. Yet, a clear understanding on such problems as the future of nuclear weapons (we are reducing ours, Beijing is modernizing theirs), the current trade imbalance, and the two countries' political-military roles in the Asia-Pacific region—not to mention the fate of Taiwan—still eludes the U.S. and China. For Americans, perhaps the most sobering aspect of China's Tiananmen problem is this: Even a more accountable regime in Beijing would remain a rising, nationalistic, great power, whose strategic, economic, and political interests are unlikely to be the same as Washington's.

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My journey to Jasper.

FIRESTARTERS

By David Grann

JASPER, TEXAS

Darrell Flinn wouldn't say it was an omen, exactly. But the fires did start right around the time those three white boys allegedly tied that Negro behind a pickup truck and dragged him for three miles down Huff Creek Road in nearby Jasper, Texas. They burned all night, sometimes for more than a week. Helicopters swept down, spraying water, though it didn't seem to do much good. It hadn't rained hard for more than two months, and all it took was a bolt of lightning, the flick of a cigarette, or a spark from an engine before another blaze broke out.

On this Tuesday, a teenager had lit a fire right there in Vidor, where Flinn lived, sending up flames from the yellow pine trees even as he sat out with his three little kids at Smith Lake to cool off in the sweltering heat. "It's so hot we can't even burn a cross," Flinn said, glancing at me. "There's a state ordinance against any loose fires."

That, of course, meant no cross-burning at this Saturday's rally, though it didn't much matter to Flinn. Everyone in the media would be there anyway. He'd already been on MSNBC, CNBC, CBS, "Hard Copy." Even a reporter from Italy had called that morning. "How do you say nigger in Italian, 'negre'?" he mused aloud.

I didn't say anything, and watched as he took off his combat boots and T-shirt and exposed his belly to the sun. "What do you think's gonna happen in Jasper?" he asked. "You think those niggers with shotguns will show up?"

Looking up from my notebook, I shrugged and asked how many from his Klan would show up.

Flinn said he didn't like to make predictions because if he said 40, and only 20 showed up, it would seem like the event was a failure. "I estimate a hundred and forty," he said, suddenly throwing away his caution. He started to tick off the other groups, pausing after each for emphasis: Alabama White Knights ... Missouri's New Order Knights ... America's Invisible Empire ... The American Knights ... North Georgia White Knights.... Finally, Flinn got up to go in the lake. Tommy, his four-year-old son, was sitting on the shore with his feet crossed, shivering even in the heat. "You wanna go swimming out with daddy?" he said. The boy didn't move. "You got a fever?" he asked, touching his forehead. Flinn reached down and scooped some water on Tommy Bird's head to cool him off, then dove in himself.

His oldest son was swimming nearby. "Come on over here, Brandon, and tell Mr. David what ya wanna be when you grow up."

"I dunno yet," he said, dipping his head under water. "I'm only eight."

Flinn made a cone with his hands over his head, as if he were playing charades. "Tell Mr. David. He came all the way from Washington. It's okay. I told ya you could tell him."

Brandon studied his father's hands. "A fireman?"

"What else? What does daddy do in the nighttime?"

The boy squinted, then smiled. "A Klansman?"

"That's right," Flinn said, grinning at me, as if imparting some important lesson to both of us. Then, in one swift motion, he wrapped his arms around Brandon and dove into the water, kicking up his legs so that only a small tattoo of a dragon glimmered in the hot sun.

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I got to Texas two weeks after James Byrd Jr. was dragged to his death for no other apparent reason than he was black, and after Jesse Jackson and the Rev. Al Sharpton and NAACP President Kweisi Mfume and California Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater had come to pay their respects, and after the president of the United States had sent his condolences, and after Dennis Rodman had offered to pay for Byrd's funeral, and after Don King had donated $100,000 to a memorial fund, and after the KKK had announced it would rally in Jasper to raise white people's pride, and after the New Black Panther Party and the Black Muslims had vowed to show up with shotguns to arm the black people of Jasper against the Klan.

I wasn't sure exactly why I was there, other than that everyone else from the media was there—convinced, perhaps, that the Old South was rising again, at least for an afternoon. Before I got to Jasper, though, I had stopped in Vidor, about an hour away, because that was where the old Klan still purportedly thrived and where Darrell Flinn, the imperial wizard of the Knights of the White Kamellia, had moved recently with his wife and three boys.

Vidor, it turned out, looked just the way it sounded: poor, grimy, and mean. The local grocery store posted a sign saying "No guns allowed," and the pawnshop across the street sold silver bracelets and secondhand AK-47s. Even though the city was named after King Vidor, the movie director who, in 1929, directed *Hallelujah*, the first Hollywood movie with an all-black cast, the population remained all white, save for a handful of families holed up in a small federal housing project across the train tracks—the "coon cage," Flinn called it. In 1993, when the first African American in more than six decades moved into Vidor under a government-enforced desegregation order, several Klansmen showed up in white sheets. Five years later, several blacks in the surrounding area told me they still don't stop here for gas at night, even though the hand-painted sign on Main Street saying "Nigger, Don't Let the Sun Set on You in Vidor" was taken down some 30 years ago.

While Flinn and I were swimming, city officials in Jasper—which is over 40 percent black—pleaded with the media and the black militants and the KKK not to turn their fishing town into another Vidor. We don't want hate groups here, black or white, said the county sheriff, a burly white man wearing a ten-gallon hat. Neither did the city's first black mayor nor, more importantly, the Byrd family.

But Flinn insisted the Klan would come anyway, which was not surprising. What was surprising was his professed reason why. "We want to condemn the killing, not endorse it," he said. "No one deserves to die like that."

At least in public, Flinn is trying to put a friendlier face on what's left of the hate movement. As the KKK's membership has dwindled to fewer than 5,000 across the country, Flinn, like David Duke before him, has sought to reinvent the Klan as simply one more victimized group demanding its rights. "We do not advocate violence anymore," he told me—unless, that is, "we are met with violence."

But, when I arrived at the SHAPE Community Center in southeast Houston the next night, a half-dozen Black Panthers and Muslims were already loading their weapons—shotguns and street sweepers and AR-15s—as they plotted strategy for Saturday's showdown in the town square. "The white man will confront something new in Jasper," proclaimed Quanell X, a 27-year-old former youth minister of the Nation of Islam and the current leader of the militant Black Muslims. "Well-trained, well-organized, and disciplined black men."

As Quanell stood, two guards clad in army fatigues toting twelve-gauge shotguns rushed to his side. Unlike his troops, the general carried none of the paraphernalia of war. He wore an Armani suit and a diamond-studded gold watch.

As he filed past me, one of the guards said, "Search the cracker before he gets in the car." I pulled my pad and pen out of my pocket and spread my arms.

Outside, we climbed into an onyx-colored Mercedes and headed for the Fox television studio, where Quanell would debate on-air the infamous Klansman, Michael Lowe. While we sped along the back streets of Houston, looking through the tinted windows at the black kids sitting on their porches smoking cigarettes in the 100-degree heat, I asked Quanell X why he felt compelled to go to Jasper if most people there didn't want him. "It's simple," he said. "We want to say to the KKK that your days of intimidating, harassing, and instigating violence against black people is all over.... We are willing and ready—*take this left here*—to fight the Klan by any means necessary.... That if you want a war—*here! here!*—we'll be damned if we won't give you one."

"What about the black pastors from Jasper who don't want you to come?" I asked.

"I don't give two cents about what some weak-kneed, handkerchief-head, Negro pastor thinks of me. I'm only interested in what God thinks of me."

If the Ku Klux Klan had learned that the best way to get attention was to advocate hatred camouflaged by kindness, then the Black Panthers and Muslims had learned that the best way to get attention was to advocate peace through violence. At the television studio, where Quanell X had become a regular in the days after Byrd's killing, the militant leader disappeared into the bathroom and reemerged wearing a white bow tie.

While a technician connected his earpiece, Quanell and the rest of us could hear Lowe's trademark lisp, testing his mike from another studio in Texas. Then came another voice, the host's, even louder: "The KKK and a so-called group of black radicals are heading to a town where a black man was allegedly killed by white supremacists. Will there be more bloodshed?... Up

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next!" Quanell narrowed his eyes at the camera's white light. "Okay," said a producer in the control room. "Hold onto your shirts—and thank God they can't touch each other."

The next morning another fire broke out, this one right near Jasper. "It's supposed to get even hotter," said Flinn. I'd stopped by one last time for breakfast with the imperial wizard at Gary's Coffee Shop. There, Flinn introduced me to James, the current grand dragon of the Knights of the White Kamellia, who would only give me his first name. Unlike Flinn, James didn't look much like the new "improved" Klan: His hair and eyes were a muted yellow, his teeth brown and crooked, and tattoos were stenciled all along his arms. When I asked him if he'd bring a shotgun to the rally, he lit his second Marlboro of the morning and said, "I'll probably bring something just in case." Each time the talk took such a turn, Flinn nudged him with his elbow. Later, when I got up to leave, James looked suspiciously at my scribbled handwriting and asked, "What religion are you, anyway?" I didn't say anything. "You gotta be somethin'," he said, leaning across the table. I glanced at Flinn, then back at James, whose veins were tightening in his arms. I thought for a moment of my bar mitzvah. "Episcopalian," I said.

The town of Jasper woke up Friday morning to the sounds of gospel, to calls for unity and peace. "I don't need the Black Panthers to come speak for me as a black person," said Bobby Hudson, a tall, lanky preacher in a red satin shirt and white shoes. He stood outside Fowler's Garage, where James Byrd used to sit and sip beer and chew tobacco and while the days away with his friends. "This is not about this town. What transpired here is about three sick people," he said.

Byrd's old friends, all of whom were black, nodded. "Amen, brother. That's right."

But, outside the courthouse, the press was already gathering with their tripods and booms and satellite trucks. In the center of a nest of cameras, a black man from Houston, named Motapa, with blue and red and green and yellow pigments on his face handed out leaflets saying, "I will fast on air for three days." As the cameras focused on him, he exclaimed: "The blood of James Byrd is like the sacrament of Jesus Christ. It will spread all over America," while a friend of his waved a cane at me and predicted that, in 24 hours, "this is going to be bigger than the O.J. Simpson trial."

Except that something strange was happening in Jasper: While the hotels filled with visitors, most of the locals were fleeing town. Unlike the late 1950s and 1960s, when people rose up from within the very fabric of Southern society—blacks from the streets and the churches, the Klan from the local businesses and bars—Jasper's race war was being fueled entirely by outsiders, by a handful of atomized groups. On this Saturday morning, the journalists came in droves, from Paris and Tokyo and Bonn and New York and New Orleans. By 10:00 a.m., they vastly outnumbered the spectators and law enforcement officers and swarmed from one side of the square to the other, searching for angry white men or black men or *any* men to film. "This is a joke," said a journalist holding a mike. "Where's all the fuckin' bloodshed?" When a lone Klansman finally arrived with a young boy, carrying Confederate flags, an army of reporters surrounded him. "That's it," prodded one cameraman, "show us the tattoo. . . . Can you give us a side shot?. . . *Perfect*. . . . *Perfect*." But, as the press pushed closer, the Klansman's teenage companion began to tremble. "Do you hate me?" shouted a black reporter. "No," the boy said sheepishly. "Then *who* do you hate?" He looked around at the cameras, searching for his friend. On the verge of tears, he blurted out, "Everybody."

After an hour of this, the press moved on, bored and listless. As I considered leaving, 25 Klansmen, led by Flinn, appeared in black and white robes, surrounded by a phalanx of police wearing riot gear. Then came the Panthers, toting rifles and chanting, "Black power." "We can take these bastards!" screamed one. "We can run over the damn police and take their asses!" There were no more than a handful of them, but, upon spotting the cameras, they began to charge—unleashing a stampede of more than 300 reporters. I chased after Quanell X in his ochre Armani suit and matching alligator shoes, shouting questions he couldn't hear. I climbed onto a bench for a better view. From there, I could see a Panther being filmed by a Klansman who was being filmed by the police—all of whom were being filmed by the media.

After a momentary retreat, the seven Panthers charged again. And again, I was running, pushing against the barricades to keep up with them. I saw a girl fall and a cameraman step on her.

Shaken, I made my way across the square, away from the crowd, which was still racing from side to side in a kind of unrehearsed theater. I found my car and drove through town, out into the country, past the local paper and the sheriff's station, until I stopped outside a small wooden house, where the Byrds lived. Two police guards stood outside. "How are things in town?" one guard asked, looking at my sweat-stained clothes.

"Not so good," I said, though the more I thought about it, the more I realized how little the chaos in the square had anything to do with the killing of James Byrd, or with anything real.

I asked for directions out to Huff Creek Road—an unmarked street on the outskirts of town. I crossed over a bridge straddling a trough of dust and passed several run-down houses, a Baptist church, and a cemetery. Finally, below a row of yellow pine trees, I pulled over and began to walk back toward town, past where they had allegedly beaten Byrd and tied his ankles to a chain. After a half-mile or so, I came upon an orange painted circle, then another, and another, marking where the police had found Byrd's severed head and torso and limbs. There was still blood encrusted in the dirt. The crime scene ran for two-and-a-half miles, and, as I neared the end, I felt the first drops of rain. •

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The case against the Fourth of July.

STOP THE CELEBRATION

By Sebastian Mallaby

Independence Day is a time for barbecues and beaches. But it is also a good time to reflect upon a paradox, a paradox so simple that perhaps only a foreigner like me would pause to point it out. Americans revere their Founding Fathers: they teach school children about them; they name streets after them; they cite the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as holy writ. And yet, at the same time, Americans have mixed feelings about the political system that the Founders have created. They feel that the government erected in the name of the people actually ignores the problems of ordinary people; they are fed up with the endless argument that the separation of powers has wrought.

This paradox is not temporary. Veneration for the founding stretches back into the nineteenth century, while antipathy toward government has fueled political careers from Thomas Jefferson to Newt Gingrich. Nor is this paradox superficial. The statesmen and the documents of the founding are revered by all kinds of Americans, from new immigrants to descendants of the Pilgrims, while the mistrust of government is documented by a host of opinion polls. Most importantly, this paradox is not without its implications. Americans' veneration for the founding not only contrasts oddly with their unease about its consequences; it actually contributes to modern disillusionment. As long as Americans hanker after the imagined perfection of the early republic, they will never be content with the current state of politics.

This claim, if accepted, turns much talk about American politics on its head. The standard view takes the wisdom of the founding for granted and then blames contemporary discontents on the modern additions to American democracy. Opinion polls, multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns, and spin doctors are thus cast as villains, intruding upon and ruining the Eden created by Washington and Hamilton, Madison and Jefferson. And yet the key to rebuilding Americans' trust in government may lie not in greater fealty to the Founders but rather in greater willingness to break the spell of their memory. In almost all areas, Americans have done well by welcoming modern innovations, not by gazing backwards. They should apply the same habit to politics.

It is never tactful for a visiting foreigner to attack his hosts' patriotism; and attacking America's devotion to the Founders may seem especially unwise (and *especially* unwise for an Englishman). Lacking a common religion, ethnicity, or anything much else to hold it together, America feels a pressing need for unifying myths and symbols, and it has found these in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the flag. You are Japanese or French if you are born that way. But being American is a matter less of descent than of consent. You must consent to the ideas and freedoms that the founding represents. When the first Americans declared independence from my country, they asserted no cultural or ethnic differences with England. They asserted their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Based on ideas, and ideas only, America is at once noble and fragile. The Founders themselves understood this fragility, and so they infused their precious ideas with the aura of scripture, hoping this would protect them from the wear and tear of everyday debate. George Washington pleaded that "the Constitution be sacredly maintained," while James Madison described the founding documents as "political scriptures," hoping that they would acquire "that veneration, which time bestows on every thing, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability." And so Americans established a civil religion in place of a spiritual one. Their Protestant reverence for the Bible was transferred to the founding texts.

The Founders' civil religion has been preached enthusiastically by their successors. In 1837, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Constitution's drafting, John Quincy Adams, paraphrasing from the instruction to the Israelites in Deuteronomy, urged his countrymen to "Teach the [Constitution's] principles, teach them to your children, speak of them when sitting in your home, speak of them when walking by the way, when lying down and when rising up, write them upon the doorplate of your home and upon your gates." A gener-

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ation later, Lincoln advocated "reverence for the laws" as the "political religion of the nation."

Which is precisely what exists today. Each September, the National Constitution Center, an organization created by an act of Congress in the wake of the bicentennial, celebrates Constitution Week. It reminds Americans that their Constitution is the oldest written national charter still in force anywhere; that its opening declaration of "We the People" has been imitated in constitutions all around the world. Over the past six years, more than 1.5 million Americans have added their own names to copies of the Constitution at signing ceremonies in schools, libraries, museums, and national parks. The Constitution Center runs a Constitution website, which invites visitors to click on "The Blessings of Liberty" or "Created Equal." There are plans to build a $130 million constitutional museum on Independence Mall in Philadelphia. Last year, a survey commissioned by the center found that 89 percent of Americans feel proud of their Constitution, while 91 percent regard it as important to them.

It may seem futile, then, for a foreigner to question America's devotion to the founding. And yet I shall persist. Though America's civil religion may indeed serve at times to unite the country, it also has its dangers. When America's leaders declare that the Founding Fathers were divinely inspired, or when celebrations describe the Constitutional Convention as a "miracle," each fuels Americans' belief that their country is "chosen," that it has a "manifest destiny," that it is, or should be, pure. These notions are not sustainable. And so, when Americans discover that their government sometimes lies, cheats, or panders to special interests, the result is bitter disillusionment.

Many thoughtful people acknowledge this danger and defend America's civil religion nonetheless. They contend that national myths not only unify the country but also inspire it—and that these advantages more than outweigh the risk of disillusionment. It would be nice to believe this and to return, relieved, to barbecues. But the unifying power of America's civil religion is not as great as most people suppose it is. Its power to inspire is not always constructive, and the debilitating effects of disillusionment are larger than they seem.

Consider, first, the civil religion's power to unify Americans. At times this power does indeed seem vivid. To unite themselves for war, Americans cast each conflict as a defense of the Founders' ideals of freedom and democracy. To overcome domestic crises, Americans turn to the Founders as well. Lincoln warned that a house divided against itself cannot stand and called upon his countrymen to unite around the promise of equality in the Declaration of Independence. Martin Luther King appealed to all Americans by harking back to the Founders' unifying ideals. His reliance on the Founders is reflected in the civil rights museum in Memphis, where an introductory film emphasizes the importance of the Constitution. In these celebrated cases, it is true, divided Americans have found new unity and purpose in their civil religion.

But America's national myths create forces for disunity as well as unity. In nearly every war America has fought, a minority—inspired by the supposedly unifying civil religion—has argued that the conflict does not serve America's founding ideals, and so has opposed it. In the same way, when Lincoln tried to use America's founding ideals to unite his countrymen, Southerners invoking those same Founders opposed him, citing the Constitution's protections of slavery. A century later, civil rights leaders appealed to a Constitution now rendered more sympathetic to their cause by amendments passed after the Civil War; but they, too, faced segregationist opponents who couched their arguments in terms of loyalty to the Founders, who had, after all, created a Constitution that safeguarded states' autonomy.

At a minimum, then, it is too simple to assert that the venerated documents of America's founding necessarily unify the country. Sanford Levinson, a law professor at the University of Texas, observes that congregations that unite around sacred texts tend to split over their interpretation. This is true for Jews, for Muslims, for Christians, and no less for Americans. In the nineteenth century, America's venerated Constitution did not prevent an uncivil war that cost 620,000 lives and nearly destroyed the Union. As they butchered one another, both sides invoked the Constitution, just as during the 1980s Sunni Iraqis and Shiite Iranians both claimed to be fighting a holy Muslim war. In the twentieth century, America has avoided such extreme calamity. But, on issues ranging from school prayer to abortion to civil rights, both sides in political arguments regularly cite the Constitution.

And, in some ways, the veneration of these documents—the civil religion built on top of them—actually prolongs many arguments. Because of the veneration of the founding, Americans have been taught to identify personally with their Constitution, and so to interpret it personally: you cannot spend long in America without encountering someone who carries a dog-eared copy of the document in his pocket; you cannot get through a political campaign without a candidate reading out some clause or other on the stump. This has a disunifying effect upon America. Because all Americans feel it is their birthright to engage in amateur constitutional exegesis, they think nothing of second-guessing interpretations handed down by the Supreme Court. And this weakens the main technique that text-based congregations use to avoid schism, which is to give interpretational authority to an institution like the Vatican or the Supreme Court.

Fortified by a civil religion that is, in this sense, Protestant, fringe groups in America feel entitled to assert almost anything, provided some clause or other of the Constitution can be construed as sympathetic to their cause. The gun lobby is strident, because it is fortified by a tendentious reading of the Second Amendment. The opponents of campaign finance re-

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form are strident, because the First Amendment has in the past been construed to prohibit some attempts at overhauling political money. In fact, it is a rule of thumb in America that the more marginal and extreme an opinion, the more constitutional arguments are likely to be wheeled in as support. The right-wing militias enjoy sympathy from almost nobody; to make up for this, they can recite large hunks of the Constitution by heart.

None of this is to attack America's Constitution or to disparage its safeguards against majoritarian tyranny. It is merely to question the assumption that America's civil religion promotes national unity. By encouraging personal interpretations of the Constitution, the civil religion exposes the Constitution to an anarchy of conflicting interpretations. As a result, fringe views enjoy a patina of respectability that they do not deserve. And the supposed foundation for American politics, the document that is meant to hold a vast and diverse country together, turns out to be the subject of discord instead.

So the first claim for America's civil religion—that it promotes national cohesion—appears to be exaggerated. Now consider the second claim: that it inspires America to become a better place. Again, the examples of Lincoln and King are useful here, for both men invoked the religion in order to vanquish racial oppression. The project of America, in Lincoln's view and in that of many reformers after him, is to narrow the gap between the founding ideals and its imperfect reality. If people are disillusioned by politics, then disillusionment will inspire them to demand change. The idealization of the founding, on this view, is a source of eternal political vitality.

It is certainly true that Americans demand improvements to their political system at a prodigious rate. At any given time, there is at least one debate raging about America's political machinery: about the ethics rules in Congress, about the president's invocation of executive privilege, about the legality of using a government telephone to dial for campaign dollars. At any given time, too, one of the three branches of the federal government is reckoned to have overreached itself. Over the past 25 years or so, there have been books criticizing the "imperial presidency," the "imperial Congress," and the "imperial judiciary." Americans constantly wonder whether experts have supplanted ordinary citizens; or whether, on the contrary, popular democracy has supplanted the experts. Americans constantly propose amendments to the Constitution—further belying the contention, incidentally, that veneration of the Constitution fosters unifying consensus. This constant clamor for reform gives rise to a peculiar feature of America: The subject of politics is often politics itself.

The question is whether this clamor is really healthy. When the reform at issue is the abolition of slavery, or the entrenchment of black voting rights, reformism seems beyond reproach. But many reforms are less obviously desirable. America's yearning to perfect democracy has stoked support for populist devices, such as citizen ballot initiatives and term limits; and these have often had the perverse effect of making democracy worse. America's yearning to perfect the Declaration's promise of freedom and equality has stoked a gradual extension of rights over the past half-century and so has laid the basis for this decade's culture wars.

Meanwhile, the main drawback of America's civil religion—that it promotes excessive idealism—tends to be underplayed. This is no doubt because it is hard to dislike idealism; if the alternative is cynicism, idealism wins any day. But the seeming choice between idealism and cynicism is a false one. It is precisely because of their idealistic expectations that Americans have fallen into cynicism. Because they are idealistic, Americans are constantly proposing ways of improving their political system. When these proposals fail, cynicism prevails.

This puts the claim that America's civil religion exercises an invigorating influence over American politics in a rather different light: It makes glorious rejuvenation seem like an inglorious perpetuation of adolescence. America stands out for the fact that in no other mature democracy is democracy so immature—in the sense that, rather than settling comfortably into worn routines and patterns, it is forever staying up late to agonize over a possible life change and fret over its most basic goals. America might stop fretting if it let go of its veneration for its Founders and stopped seeing its government in idealized terms. And, by tempering its idealism, America would increase its chances of passing some of the reforms that might actually increase satisfaction with government. For excessive idealism not only causes the disease of cynicism. It blocks the cure as well.

Consider, for example, proposals to make representative government work better, essentially by limiting popular pressures that distort decision-making by lawmakers. At various times, there have been suggestions that senators face the polls every eight years, rather than every six years; that House terms should be four years rather than two. It's a plausible idea: Longer terms of office might reduce the political class's obsession with polls and partisanship. But, because of America's idealism about democracy, these practical proposals turn out to be impractical. There is much more popular enthusiasm for imposing term limits on members of Congress than for extending congressmen's tenure. Idealism not only fosters some naïve reformism; it also suffocates the more sober sort.

And so, on Independence Day, it is worth taking a second look at the parades and the patriotism. As a foreigner in America, I have to say that I love living among idealists; I admire the aspiration and the striving and the hope. But I cannot honestly believe that idealism is always healthy. If Americans seemed happy with their political system, I would keep my mouth shut. But Americans say they are not happy. So, nervously, I put aside my English reticence. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Culture Gapping

Here's a curious book. It states a striking thesis. It then moves to substantiate that thesis, but its arguments are highly arguable. Nonetheless, despite the problematic proofs, we're unable to shake the central idea.

The title leads the way—**Differences in the Dark: American Movies and English Theater** (Columbia University Press, 188 pp., $22.50). The author, Michael T. Gilmore, who teaches English and American literature at Brandeis, has spent some time in London going to the theater. From this experience, added to his obvious prior and continuing enthusiasm for American films, comes this book.

"Using fairly conventional categories," he says, Gilmore sketches profiles of the two societies, America and Britain. He concedes that generalizations about nations are notoriously risky, yet he ventures that "Americans are the global frontrunners in technology," while "the British, though once the wedge of the Industrial Revolution, no longer signify the modern." From this, he works out that film, because it's the one art that flowered from technology, is predominant in America, while the theater, which upholds "customary values against the possible future symbolized by movies," dominates Britain. "In contrast to American cities like Boston and New York [apparently the places he knows best] where cultural life, even that of intellectuals, is saturated with the movies, in London the premier art form is the theater."

Gilmore is aware of exceptions and objections to this pronouncement. (Somewhat nervously aware. The book is studded with proleptic remarks anticipating rebuttal.) But he proceeds to deploy his arguments, ranging through politics, economics, aesthetics, and metaphysics, arguments that are both direct and tangential. For instance, he devotes six pages to the two countries' differing attitudes toward paper money—America pro, Britain reluctant—ending with "the conquest of Britain by the United States as world imperium and of live entertainment by the intangible circulating image." Thus he connects the American attitude toward easily circulating paper symbols with our liking for easily circulating symbolic entertainment.

The general social ambiance in Britain, Gilmore feels, is quite different from the United States. "A palpable feeling of community, linking performers and audience, and a deference to the decrees of nature, in the artistic medium that still relies on human material, the presence of the actor and actress: these were the recurrent motifs in my six months' adventure as a [London] theatergoer." He even finds relevance to his thesis of natural presence in the fact that the British never play football or tennis on artificial surfaces, always on grass. (We can sense that Gilmore, already enamored of English literature, has fallen a little in love with Britain itself. This both sharpens and softens some of his comments.)

A sampling of his other views. In a section on climate, Gilmore contends that the American affinity for film is related to the fact that American weather is more propitious for filming than British weather. "To state the matter as bluntly as possible, England lacks the necessary climate to have established a bustling film industry." Does this really explain much? What about the climate in Sweden and Russia? Not exactly California sunshine. Perhaps their film industries don't bustle, but their film histories far surpass Britain's. Patently other factors matter.

One such that Gilmore cites is Jews.

> Jews have been among the principal architects of the movie industry, and no country save Israel has been as welcoming to them as the United States.... In the great migration of peoples from Eastern Europe between 1880 and World War I, some two million Jews deserted Russia, Poland and Rumania; scarcely one-tenth chose Britain as their destination.... Britain, civilized nerve center of drama ... became one of the first nations in the West to pass legislation against the influx of Jewish foreigners.

This, according to Gilmore, explains why L.B. Mayer, Adolph Zukor and others continued westward. But there's an oddity here in regard to the British theater. Some foreigners evidently overcame or outlasted that hostile legislation, entered Britain, and produced such theater figures as Peter Brook and Harold Pinter.

Gilmore considers American and British acting and their relation to film and theater. "In film ... what matters is who you are, in the theater what counts is what you do." So, he opines, film is more suited to American actors and vice versa. But, for all the taciturn American personalities like Eastwood and Wayne, there have also been Brando and Bette Davis. British films have certainly had

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Beyond Silence. *From Germany. A girl with normal hearing has two deaf parents. No tear-jerking, much sensitive acting and directing. (Reviewed 6/22/98)* **The Land Girls.** *During World War II, three English girls volunteer for farm work. Everything's romanticized, but it's pleasant. (7/13/98)* **Passion in the Desert.** *Balzac's tale of a soldier in the Sahara and his strange encounter with a (female) leopard. Oddly credible. Exquisitely made. (7/6/98)* **The Truman Show.** *A man's entire life, unknown to him, is on TV. The real secret captives, however, are us. Plot glitches, but very effective. (6/29/98)*—**SK**

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their tight-lipped divinities, but they have also brought us the storms of Albert Finney and Robert Shaw and Glenda Jackson, not tremendous global stars but certainly powerful leading actors.

Gilmore pays scant attention to a practical reason as to why British film drew more actors, proportionately, from the London stage than Hollywood did from Broadway. America is the only country in the world where the theater capital is not also the film capital. Here the capitals are 3,000 miles apart, and before airplane travel an actor had almost to choose one of two careers. Even now, opting for films in America makes a substantive difference in an actor's career. British actors have much more easily been able to lead both lives.

On theater history Gilmore is a bit wobbly. He calls the theater elitist and says: "Historically, this exclusivity has been a defining attribute of English life, and a contrast to the United States. The legitimate English theater has always gloried in its unpopularity." Historically, this is quite untrue. See, for example, Cruickshank's or Barnard's drawings of theater galleries in the nineteenth century. Or read Henry Morley on theater audiences in 1853: "The crowd at Drury Lane is a gross discredit to the public taste." And far from being out of reach in cost, the nineteenth-century theaters reduced prices for those who were willing to come late for an evening's bill, which often began at 6:30 and ended at midnight. Besides, if the London theater is "still an elitist art attracting a well-to-do and mainly white clientele," this situation—excepting plays and shows on black subjects—is also true of Broadway.

One point that Gilmore might have investigated is the differing national attitudes toward language as reflected in film and theater. Yes, the English theater is laced with the vernacular of Brenton and Poliakoff and others, and American film sometimes has the elaborate language of a Whit Stillman or Neil LaBute. But, predominantly, American films aim at language that is indistinguishable from the street outside, and the English theater, not least because of its alpine heritage, is a treasury of marvelous language. For reasons of relative heterogeneity and homogeneity, America is generally less interested than Britain in preserving and furthering rich, precise language.

Finally, Gilmore's book leaves us with a contradiction. Every one of the supporting arguments for his thesis can be countered. Yet, for some reason, something in us *wants* the thesis to be true, whatever the facts are. If the thesis doesn't absolutely convince, at least it teases us—toward a comfortable sense of cultural arrangement. •

AMY GUTMANN AND DENNIS THOMPSON

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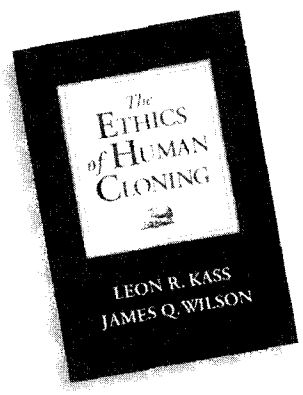

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Angels on television, angels in America.

Quality Wings

By Ruth Shalit

I.

Pity the novice inner traveler. A spiritually starved soul seeking a dose of uplift along with her chai can head over to Borders' Books and Music, where, in the God/Inspiration/Religion section, she might browse through treatises on astral projection, alien despoliation, and the healing power of crystals before alighting on *Angel Voices*, Simon and Schuster's illustrated guide to the hordes of kindly putti who watch over us from the skies. Here are small, chubby, exceedingly happy extraterrestrials, lollygagging on stars and plummeting from crescent moons, ready to post at our bidding o'er land and sea if only we will promise to snuggle, cuddle, nuzzle, and love them forever. They come to us, writes Karen Goldman, on "quality wings."

"Be true to your inner angel," they tell us. "Keep a journal of your angelic thoughts." "Accept your angels' blessing and light and worry no more." These bite-sized beatitudes arrive through the good offices of Goldman, who is, according to her publisher, an aspiring angel. "Angels are directing and guiding her writing," declares Simon and Schuster, which does not usually allow angels to do its work. Also, she "came to the topic of angels innocently." The slight note of defensiveness is understandable. For few among these merchants of wonderment, these entrepreneurs of sweet transcendence and gossamer epiphany who come to channel these lightsome beings, can credibly say that they do so innocently.

There is Andrew Ramer, coauthor of *Ask Your Angels*, who came to know the reality of angelic presence after "Cheryl Woodruff, editor of [Ballantine's] meditation, self-help, and recovery books, "told him of her vision of a book that gives the reader concrete tools for working with angels." Equally blessed were Barbara Mark and Trudy Griswold, authors of *Angelspeake*, two sisters who began to keep an eye peeled for angels after noticing that "there was something we needed to do with our lives that was very important and it was coming closer." It wasn't long before "the angels told us we would write a book." Hope Price, author of *Angels* ("they are with us always,") had her epiphany at a Christian book convention, when a speaker from Avon Books mentioned that he was always on the lookout "for a gap in the market." "As he said that sentence," Price writes in her preface. "I knew God was speaking into my heart." This was not the God of wrath, of course. It was the God of smart money.

Not surprisingly, the market testers of network television also did not come to the topic of angels innocently. In 1993, Peter Tortorici, then president of CBS Entertainment, set out in search of something fluffy to cash in on the craze. He hired a producer named John Masius to put together a show that would capitalize on what Tortorici referred to in *Time* as "the growing trend in spirituality and the revived fascination with angels." Several months later, to Tortorici's horror, Masius came back to him with the rough cut of a show that took as its theme the "incomprehensible suffering in the world." In Masius's never-aired pilot, the splenetic seraphs raged and beat their wings and brooded to one another about why God toyed with humans for sport. This was not quite the elixir that CBS had in mind. And so Masius was replaced by Martha Williamson, a veteran producer and self-described "show doctor" who pledged to deliver a more life-affirming product. All they had to go on, writes Williamson in her recent memoir, was "Roma Downey and Della Reese and the word *angel*."

Touched by an Angel
(CBS)

Teen Angel
(ABC)

When Angels Speak: Inspiration from Touched by an Angel
by Martha Williamson
(Fireside, 272 pp., $9)

Angel Voices: The Advanced Handbook for Aspiring Angels
by Karen Goldman
(Simon and Schuster, 160 pp., $18)

Angelspeake: A Guide
by Barbara Mark and Trudy Griswold
(Simon and Schuster, 128 pp., $13.95)

Angel Energy: How to Harness the Power of Angels in Your Everyday Life
by John Randolph Price
(Fawcett Columbine, 242 pp., $12)

Ask Your Angels
by Alma Daniel, Timothy Wyllie, and Andrew Ramer
(Ballantine, 358 pp., $12)

The refurbished version of *Touched by an Angel*, featuring a dream team of ethnically balanced angels who rove around the country twiddling heartstrings and performing good works, debuted in the fall of 1994. And the reviews, as *Entertainment Weekly* put it, were "from hell." Fearing cancellation, the show's producers mounted a fervent save-the-angels campaign. Williamson appeared on *The 700 Club* and other religious programs, entreating the armies of the righteous to send postcards and letters summoning the network to virtue. The conservative columnist Cal Thomas urged the faithful to blanket CBS with letters: "Start lighting some candles instead of only cursing the darkness. That's what the angels do." Godly screenwriters from a "prayer group of Hollywood professionals" went so far as to take out a full-page ad in *Daily Variety*. "God is Alive and Well on American Network TV," proclaimed the ad, which begged CBS to stick with the struggling series. "But for How Long?"

For very long, it now appears. The prayers were answered. *Touched by an Angel* is now television's second-highest rated drama. Last season, with an average audience of 18 million viewers, it finished behind only *ER*, the other prime-time tribute to peripatetic, white-frocked healers. The reviews also turned around; and some of the stars of the show call its redemption a matter of cosmic design. "If we are being as brazen as to invoke the name of God on TV," the actor John Dye, who plays the Angel of Death, told *TV Guide*. "If we were doing it poorly, I just don't think God would bless the show, and allow it to continue."

Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS Television, reflected that "*Touched by an Angel* has touched a chord which America desperately wants." America, and the other networks, too. There has occurred an avalanche of angelology in prime-time. The faithful can choose among *Touched by an Angel*, *Teen Angel*, *Seventh Heaven*, *Promised Land*, and *The Visitor*, about an alien who is really an angel. And there are more seraphic she-

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nanigans in store: the WB Network will soon unveil *The Confessor*, about an angel who is really an alien, and ABC has shot back with *Cupid*, the tale of a mischievous angel who must now atone for his roguery by bringing one hundred couples back together. (He will have to work quickly; the network has only ordered six episodes.)

Not all the angel shows are serious. *Teen Angel* centers around the misadventures of Marty, a smarmy pubescent who ascends to heaven after eating a spoiled cheeseburger. The show's approach to matters spiritual could best be described as irreverent. As Marty ascends into the starry firmament, we hear the heavenly elevator operator call out the floors of the celestial hierarchy: "First floor: Seraphim. Second floor: Cherubim. Third floor: Starbucks." Marty takes his marching orders from a giant head hovering menacingly in the empyrean. "Now, Marty," thunders this omniscient encephalon, "Go forward and help your friend." "I'll do my best, God," Marty replies. "You are God, aren't you?" Marty asks at one point. "No," rasps the head, his cheeks puffed out like Zephyr, the billowing wind god. "I'm God's cousin—Rod."

For the most part, however, angel television does not go in for heresy. The shows hew to the didactic *Touched* model: we are meant to take them straight and be improved. Far from impelling the citizenry to reflection, however, the new angelology is a consumerist orgy of superstition, a folk religion unto itself, possessing its own dainty props and ritualistic refinements. From angel greeting cards to angel tarot cards to the swashbuckling lady-killer angels who leer at us sexily from the cover jackets of Andrew Greeley's *Angel Fire* supermarket romances, these shining superbeings saturate the souls and the wallets of the wounded and the confused: a kind of mythopoetic white noise, God's own kitsch.

Among the professors, naturally, these downy creatures have been embraced as playful signifiers of celestial sexual politics at its most lofty. Their celebrated gender elasticity, their status as heavenly messengers—or "message-bearing systems," as one commentator prefers to call them—their occupation of a "liminal" realm between human and supernatural orders: it all meshes perfectly with the postmodern worship of the betwixt and between. And so it is that these heavenly hosts have become the solemn mascots of semiotic theory. From *Approaching the Millennium: Essays on "Angels in America,"* we learn that, far from being sweet bundles of fluff, angels should be regarded as a trope, a quotational spectacle, a hermeneutic tool for unlocking capitalist cosmologies. In a series of recondite essays with titles such as "Strange Angel," "HeavenQuake," and "Flying the Angel of History," we learn that "although the construction of the Angel represses her/his historicity, the Heaven s/he calls home is explicitly the product (and victim) of temporality."

As a corrective to the vulgarities of popular taste, the angelologists of the academy prefer to murder the little creatures with exegesis. In a sumptuous coffee table volume entitled *Angels: A Modern Myth*, the French philosopher Michel Serres finds that "angels . . . fulfilled twin roles, as both verbal messengers and elemental fluxes"; that "under normal conditions their disorder forms a pretheory, a scattered stock awaiting systemization." Heaven, insufficiently theorized! It is the contemporary equivalent of an eighteenth-century anticlerical insult.

When, precisely, did the contemporary angel make its appearance? In 1975, when Billy Graham published *God's Secret Agents*, a book about angels, "there was almost nothing in print on the subject of angels." But by 1994, as he notes in the reissue of his book, angels were abounding: in the movies, on the covers of newsmagazines, on the *New York Times*

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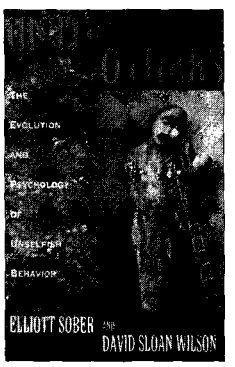

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bestseller list (which, in that year, featured no fewer than eight books on the subject). But the trend seems really to have caught fire in 1990, with the runaway success of Sophy Burnham's *A Book of Angels*. Burnham recounted wondrous tales of divine interference, including the one about the cosmonaut angel who leaps aboard the Soyuz 7 spacecraft. The success of her book spawned the wave of angels-to-the-rescue testimonials of the early '90s, including *Angel Power*, *A Rustle of Angels*, and *Brush of an Angel's Wing*, all of which described momentous encounters with interventional superheroes who can suspend the laws of physics and snatch your loved ones out of the jaws of death.

These accounts of angelic intercession were often marred by an ugly, religiose triumphalism. (An angel saves one man from a car wreck and leaves the other victims to their fate.) Still, these thrilling tales of miraculous interventions sold briskly. And soon, it seems, we wanted even more. We realized that there might be other occasions where the angels might come in handy: not to save us from gothic perils but to rescue us from the hellish indignities and the humdrum hassles of everyday existence. We realized, in the words of the authors of *Ask Your Angels*, "how available the angels are to each and every one of us, every day, and not just for special occasions."

And so, at some point, these factotums of the supermundane took on a portfolio that was, well, just plain mundane. In *Ask Your Angels* we learn of Valerie, who, "the night before she was to have root-canal work ... sat quietly and visualized her angel sending energy into her tooth." These accommodating beings are less God's servants than our executive assistants, freeing up harried New Agers for hours of unscheduled bliss and playdates with their inner seraphs. "While I relate very personally to ... my guardian angel, [whom I also consider to be] an aspect of my Higher Self," writes Alma Daniel in *Ask Your Angels*, "I am aware of help from many other celestials who assist in different ways—facilitating my travel through the city, directing my actions in a tax audit, and so forth." We also learn of a freelance publicist named Anne, who "can't afford [secretarial] help," but who "has a team of angels working with her." One day she "asked the angels to clear the post office before she arrived, so she wouldn't have to wait and could get the envelope off in time. When she arrived, the post office was empty."

In this age of hard-hearted predestination, this brave new world of bell curves and conspiracy theories, it is easy to see personal angels as the saviors of those who feel victimized by inevitabilities, who feel helpless before what they take to be their fate. Indeed, the salvific nonsense of prime time finds its gloomy reverse exposure in such paranoid fantasias as *The X-Files*, *Dark Skies*, and *Millennium*, in which America is portrayed as an apocalyptic playground. In such a world, it is not surprising that we turn to myths for reassurance, to supernatural fail-safes and superhistorical fixers, whom we never have cause to doubt.

II.

In the Bible, of course, angels are the frosty antithesis of these pinkly opiates of the New Age. They are formidable and uningratiating beings, more apt to impale the disobedient than to cuddle the vulnerable. The prophet Ezekiel describes them as "burning coals of fire ... with such height that they cause fearfulness; and their rims were full of eyes, and their beating wings making a sound like that of vast waters, like the Almighty One ... when they went, the sound of a tumult, like the sound of an encampment." Angels are agents not only of mercy but also of judgment. Angels flattened Sodom and Gomorrah, slew the firstborn of the Egyptians, and annihilated the army of Sennacherib; and in Catholic legend, the 90,000 Angels of Destruction are known to be the most enthusiastic punishers of Hell. Even among the elect, to be touched by an angel is rarely to emerge unscathed. ("Every angel is terrifying," wrote Rilke.)

In today's angelologies, by contrast, angels are portrayed as frisky pets, constantly nuzzling at our leg for approval and sweetmeats. *Ask Your Angels* markets itself as a workbook for "establishing a new form of relationship with your celestial companions—that of best friends"; and *Angel Voices* advises: "Our inner angel thrives like a child surrounded only by love and support." And angels, the new books also assure us, are not hierarchical. The authors of *Angelspeake* write of their wish to promote, in their *Good Morning America* appearance, "a real grass-roots angel experience." In *Angel Voices*, Karen Goldman announces, with democratic pride, that "angels are not elitists. They do not hide from us out of pride, but humility."

But the angels of the Bible are elitists. They are the opposite of grass-roots: they are closer to God than to man, and they know it. These haughty beings manifest themselves to mortals only on extraordinary occasions, as when God is about to change the course of history. An angel commands Moses to lead the Israelites from bondage; an angel delivers the news of Jesus's resurrection. Angels are not gladhanders, heaping benedictions on all comers. In the Bible, angelic appearances were reserved for those who God found worthy: Daniel, say, or Jesus. They were not for the indifferent, the insouciant, the depressed. And the angels of Scripture cannot be impatiently summoned. You cannot "ask your angels" or yell, "Please angels, now!"

The apocryphal literature of the Old and New Testaments teem with angel lore: there is speculation about the height, the weight, and the brightness of angels, their habits and their activities, their maximum speed, and how many of them could dance on the point of a pin. The scribe Enoch wrote breathlessly of angels shaped like lions, with the heads of crocodiles, and twelve pairs of wings. (The tradition of physical speculation about angels is long: the sixteenth-century Protestant mystic Jakob Boehme insisted that angels had hands and feet but no teeth, as they dined only on the fruit of paradise.) But it was an anonymous neoplatonist in the sixth century, writing under the name of Dionysus the Areopagite, who came up with the most authoritative report on the vital stats of angels.

In his *Celestial Hierarchy*, the Pseudo-Areopagite divided the cosmos into three bureaucratic hierarchies containing three species each, each with distinct characteristics and tasks. They are, in descending order of rectitude: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Powers, Virtues, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. Seraphim, for instance, are the angels of Love, characterized by fire. There are the dominations, heavenly bureaucrats charged with regulating angels' duties; and there are the powers, the guardians of order, who patrol the heavenly pathways on the lookout for devilish infiltration. Most bizarre are the thrones, also known as the "great wheels," or "many-eyed ones." Dionysus is somewhat vague as to precisely what they do, other than go round and round.

The heavenly hierarchies of the Pseudo-Areopagite proved especially pleasing and enduring, especially in various legends and traditions connecting the angels with the planets. All of this immense structure, of course, was peremptorily swept aside during the Reformation. Luther believed that the incarnation of Jesus made the angels superfluous as mediators between God and man. And the Catholic Church, too, soon found itself cracking down on angelological extremism, going so far

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as to purge several parvenu seraphs—Adimus, Raguel, Simiel, Uriel—from the list of those to whom it was proper to give veneration.

Ancient angels may be as insupportable as modern angels; but the angels of contemporary America nonetheless represent an imaginative and intellectual decline. Even as Americans increasingly absent themselves from the disciplines and encumbrances of traditional religion, angels have returned with a vengeance, but less as a manifestation of faith than an objectification of need, a spiritualization of psychology and sociology, a nostalgia for enchantment.

Medieval angelology propelled people out of themselves, toward a stricter standard and a higher life. In their castigations of the human, angels denoted a kind of objectivity. Modern angelology, by contrast, is entirely, indulgently, subjective. The winged visitors turn us only toward the contemplation of our own wants and moods, for which they furnish a shining endorsement. They do not castigate us, they ratify us. They do not make things harder, they make things easier.

"Before we met our angels our actions were other-directed," write the unembarrassed authors of *Ask Your Angels*. "We were governed by what other people thought we should be doing. Now, angel-tuned, we're inner-directed—motivated and inspired by the promptings of our Higher Selves." For despite what we may have heard, *Angel Answers* assures us, "the angels haven't come into our lives so that we can bask in their divine light. They have come to help us see our own luminous beauty." "It is time to focus on *you*," counsel the authors of *The Angelspeake Book of Prayer and Healing*. Time to "[tell] the angels what you would like to be, to do, or to have."

It is a supremely American revision of the tradition. Thus we learn that there are "three major categories of Asking for what you want." There's "To Be: Asking for help in achieving a personal goal.... To do: Asking for help in an activity. 'Angels, please help me get into medical school,' " and "To Have: Asking for a particular item or event. 'Angels, please help me find a new apartment.' " You can also ask the angels to help you "[focus] on areas ... where you are inhibiting your spiritual growth and maturity, and where you lack self-esteem." For instance: "Health: Are you too fat or too thin? Do you have energy and pep? Are you getting adequate rest?" There's also "Play: Where does fun come into your life?" And let's not forget "Spiritual: Are there times set aside in your life to reflect and pray? ... How often do you speak to your angels?"

Thus is the old-style angelology pressed into the service of our own civic religion of self-regard. The authors of *Ask Your Angels* suggest that you "invoke Raphael" if you are "working for global or personal healing on any level." That you invoke Uriel if you have a query about "systems, organizations, and all job-related issues." There are "pattern angels," also known as "blueprint angels." There are also, it seems, "technology angels." If you can secure the favor of these creatures, you can rest easy, knowing "that whenever you engage in any activity that involves manufactured devices, from ball-point pens to mainframe computers, you sanctify the tools you work with, and you use them in a sacred way."

Once upon a time, the fantasy of angels was supposed to lift us off the ground. It was a means of helping ordinary mortals to imagine the invisible and to approach the incomprehensible. Now it has a different utility. The angels are now the unimpeachable advocates of the pleasures of our own time and our own place, of life exactly as we find it. They urge us to surrender to various libidinal temptations and sensual sentimentalities. They want us to lighten up, to be "free and frisky," to "play dreamcastles"; to "let go of control, and let the angels do all the work." The angels of *Ask Your Angels* want us to "just have fun." "This might be," they caution, "the most difficult adventure of all." In the First Book of Enoch, the angel Raphael heals Abraham of the pain of circumcision, restores the injured hip of Jacob, and gives Noah secret knowledge that enables him to build the ark. When Raphael visits "Bobby," in *Ask Your Angels*, it is to tell him to "Just Have Fun;" to "go west, to his favorite park, and [bring] along a sketch pad."

Our nouveau angels want to ground us, to embower us in an earthly limbo of stultifying passivity. The angels of America teach the spirituality of self-absorption. The angels of *Angel Energy* counsel us to "throw away every idea of restriction and limitation having to do with age, finances, and seeming responsibilities." We can have it all. As one of the happy channellers of *Angelspeake* puts it, "God and my angels want me to be happy in every way that I want to be happy also." Some of us would prefer Rod.

We are urged, in *Angel Energy*, to "establish dialogues with one or more of the angels ... using a tape recorder is an excellent way to do this." But how will we know when we are receiving authentic angel communications? The angelologists have a characteristically hilarious answer. According to the authors of *Angelspeake*, we should excuse the angels for being a bit pontifical, as "English ... is not an angel's first language." As Barbara Mark and Trudy Griswold write, "One of their favorite things to do is to expand the concept of a word by adding a suffix such as '-ment' or '-ness' to words that don't usually require them. For example, words angels like to use are 'wonderment' or 'truthness.' If the words they make up increase understanding, they are pleased, for this is truly good reception. One time an angel said to Barbara, 'Dear one, today you are full of notness.'"

Inviting a direct encounter with the angelic world used to be an arduous process. Catherine of Siena, hoping to become what she called an "earthly angel," starved herself to death at the age of 33 after refusing to eat anything but communion wafers—"this food of angels," she called it. Teresa of Avila was visited by "an angel in bodily form" who pierced her entrails with a long golden spear. But these grueling, self-abnegating exercises are no longer necessary to visualize the joys of heaven. Forget meditating on top of a mountain for twenty years; and have no fear of spears. "If you've picked up this book," declare the authors of *Ask Your Angels*, "the angels have already touched you." According to the angel manuals, we have simply to "light a candle"; to "burn a stick of incense"; to "fill a beautiful bowl with water," or "simply move through your home, allowing yourself to be drawn to a spot that just 'feels right' "; and presto! Angels.

And if spiritual ecstasy still eludes you, there are other, somewhat more laborious options available. In an twist on Teresa's spear, *Ask Your Angels* urges us to imagine our miraculous friends coming at us with various household appliances: "Focus on the problem that you want to transform.... Next, visualize your angel floating above you. Let the image become stronger.... Notice that your angel is holding a curious device. It is a vacuum cleaner designed to clean up *bent energy ... Your angel holds the* machine in one hand and the hose in the other. There is a nozzle at the end of the hose. Slowly, your angel aims this nozzle at your physical body...."

There is, of course, a distinct whiff of autoeroticism to some of these props and oblations. The new angel narratives, it must be said, are less reminiscent of saintly disquisitions than of memoirs of masturbation, such as this bit of practi-

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cal advice from the journalist Richard Rhodes: "I collect a bedsheet, a towel, a jar of Vaseline. The television is in the living room, against one wall. I spread the doubled bedsheet over the couch where I'll sit—I'll be working, I'll sweat...." The comparison is not as inappropriate as it might at first appear. For the new, up-to-date angels urge us toward self-pleasurement in every sense of the term. In *Angel Answers*, an angel demands of us: "Can you make love to yourself with the same joy and tenderness you extend and would like from others?" "If you answer no to this question, ask yourself out on a romantic date one day soon."

But sex therapy is only the beginning. The angels in America are therapists of all kinds. In *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Richard Hofstadter predicted an era in which psychological redemption would replace religious salvation:

> Whereas men had once been able to take heart from business success as a sign that they had been saved, they now took salvation as a thing to be achieved in this life, by an effort of will, something that would bring with it success in the pursuit of worldly goals. The distinction between service to God and service to self [has] broken down.... Religion is something to be used.

But even Hofstadter and other chroniclers of the positive-thinking tradition could not have foreseen the brazenness of the new angelologies in sanctioning a kind of gloating and unrestrained utilitarianism in spiritual life. "Angels are empowered to bring you help in every area of your life," write the authors of *Angelspeake*. "Babies ask clearly, persistently, and loudly when they need something. You do the same. ASK BIG! Be positive. Ask for a lot!" "If you just say, 'I want a car,' or 'I WANT A CAR,' your angels do not have enough information," they explain. "Pretend you are ordering from a catalogue...."

The authors of these books do not deny that there are therapeutic transactions at stake here. Quite the contrary. "In a sense," writes the angel consulted by Andrew Ramer, "we companion or guardian angels are the social workers of the universe. Some of us have only a few clients, others have many." (God's social workers are more likeable than God's secret agents, I guess.) Alma Daniel, coauthor of *Ask Your Angels*, is a therapist whose guardian angel "works with the guardians of my clients to give me written transmissions on the ... nature of their problems." She even includes excerpts from her guardian angel's casebook: "Being in human form, Melody is prey to human feelings...."

If angels are indeed social workers, pledged to restore our self-esteem and to redeem our inner children from all traces of notness, then it follows that they would reserve their ministrations for the truly needy: those who believe they are not taken seriously, not desired, not noticed, not loved enough. They would visit not the prophets and the warriors and the sages, but the binge eaters, the compulsive shoppers, the entrepreneurs of dysfunction and hysterical collapse. And indeed, this seems to be the case. In the angel manuals, the angel-touched are caricatures of puniness and vulnerability and abject resourcelessness:

> I have suffered from chronic depression and fatigue for over forty-four years. The doctors say it is a chemical imbalance in the brain....
>
> I had two kids to raise (one with a learning disability). I had problems with my daughter, problems with my landlady, car troubles....
>
> I grew up in a house with alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and emotional illness.
>
> For two months I had hives. Then came the debilitating muscle and joint pains....

And what do God's angels have to say to all of these nervous nellies and wet blankets? Do they rouse them out of their patchouli torpor and tell them what they used to tell them, to get up, to rise quickly, to arise and go? Not exactly. For these angels, it turns out, are a lot like the spirituality authors: benign, tolerant, forgiving of all foibles. Far from visiting judgment on the unworthy, they bring the manna of reassurance. "Dearest Children," they write to the readers of *Angelspeake*. "If we could give you a belief, we would give you this one. When you find that people are trying to fix, control, or manipulate you.... You never have to *explain*.... You do not have to *justify*.... You do not have to *defend*.... You are doing the best you know how to do today." The angel of *Ask Your Angel* agrees: "Remaining in regret disempowers and debilitates.... Your responsibilities are to your Self. Serve that truly, fully, and you serve all.... Stop judging yourself.... You're doing the best you can. Be satisfied that at any given moment, your consciousness is as high as you are capable."

It used to be that we needed angels because we weren't good enough for God. These days, the problem is the opposite. God, that vengeful patriarch, isn't good enough for us. He is cold and

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distant. He isn't being supportive. We believe in Him, but He doesn't seem to believe in us. "Every once in a while, someone says, 'God loves you like a father,' with no thought that very few of us had fathers who were admirable role models," scold the authors of *Angel-speake.* "One woman even told us she thought of God as the ultimate abusive parent and was scared to death of what He might do." And into this troubled setup—the Great Chain of Being as dysfunctional family—comes the social worker with quality wings, to stage an intervention, to force a therapeutic confrontation between abuser and victim. "Thank you, God, for angels!" write Barbara Mark and Trudy Griswold. "It has been through the angelic realm that we have been able to approach a once frightening God and begin to see Him as a good guy for the first time." And maybe even hug him on air, while the audience claps and whoops. These are the metaphysics of Jenny Jones.

III.

The angelologists of the New Age, with their trivial religion of undeserved trauma and easy epiphany, their childish faith that delivers an inspirational buzz that has no intellectual toll, are not really speaking the language of spirituality. They are speaking the language of television. And so it is through the softening lens of that other prophetic medium that the modern-day angel narrative has found its apotheosis; and in the process it has provided a heightened but unremarked-upon glimpse of what the rest of television is really selling.

There is, for a start, the requirement of the happy ending. On *Touched by an Angel,* the requirement is inviolable; but this time the standard pandering to the audience enjoys a divine sanction. "God likes to write happy endings," CBS's angels trill. "God has a way of taking messes and cleaning them up." And so miracles are an everyday occurrence. Lydia, a twitching teenage crack addict, is visited by the angel Monica, played by Roma Downey, who helpfully pays her rent, redecorates her apartment, even locates her discarded baby. Unimpressed by the ministrations of her miraculous friend, Lydia continues to do crack enthusiastically. And so Monica's supervisor, the angel Tess, played by Della Reese, must step in and urge the heavenly caseworker to go the extra wing-flap. "I want you to go back into that apartment, and take that child in your arms, and rock her and feed her hope like it was mother's milk," Tess instructs Monica. "This is the moment that God made angels for, baby." And so the angel goes back to the apartment, takes away the crack, and holds Lydia all night, Pietà-like, as she goes through withdrawal, humming to her, stroking her strawberry-blonde hair, rubbing her back, holding her head as she throws up. In the morning, golden sunlight bathes the room. Lydia is cured! "God is my redeemer," cries the former addict, spinning around the room, arms outstretched, welcoming her future in a Christlike embrace. "He has healed me with reassuring love."

To hear its producer tell it, *Touched by an Angel* steers well clear of the adulterations and the travesties that have characterized most commercialized exploitations of angelic imagery. "People who believe in angels," writes Martha Williamson in *When Angels Speak,* "don't like to see them trivialized." This, from the most wildly successful trivializer in the history of angelology! For it is striking to see just how faithfully the show replicates the therapeutic tropes of the dimestore theologies. When the angels of *Touched* take on earthly form, it is to assume the roles of various front-line social professionals and maestros of intervention. "Excuse me, I'm Tess—I'm a counselor from the drug treatment center," an angel croons. Or: "My name is Monica, and I'm from family services." We are professionals, the angels coolly assert. We are the experts of the higher welfare state. Leave your lives to us.

The plot of the show is essentially an extended prelude to angelic intervention, as Tess and Monica, in social-worker garb, watch with pursed lips as the principals make a hash of things, waiting till just before the final pod of commercials to reveal their true, winged nature. At that crucial moment, the principal character is often hounded and broke, forlorn and weeping. His career is in shambles, his friendships are dissolving, he is suspected of a crime that he did not commit. Suddenly a hush falls, the synthesizer furnishes the violins, and the clinician appears, beatific, wreathed in amber light. "I'm an angel, Andy," she might say. "Sent by God to tell you that He loves you." Or: "I'm an angel, Lydia. Sent here to help you heal."

At this point, these blighted souls usually knuckle under and get with the program, with the exception of a few misguided fellows who usually turn out to be tobacco executives, gun manufacturers, or neoconservatives. Satan is driven away, goodness triumphs, and faith is reaffirmed, as the protagonist weeps with relief at having found a solution to his or her problem. All under the watchful eye of an enlightened deity who insists on all sorts of pro-social lessons: Be polite. Be happy. Celebrate difference. Be sure to hug.

Martha Williamson may be a Christian, but she is also a recovery buff, who has credited God with helping her overcome a "compulsive overeating problem"; and so it is not surprising that her heavenly commandments are also the commandments of the addiction expert and the twelve-step maven. "What about *you?*" the angels demand. "When are *you* going to start to count?" On one occasion, the angel Monica goes so far as to help a young woman recover a repressed memory of abuse at the hands of her father. "There's a cycle of abuse in this house," the angel sighs. "It's been in this house for years. Now, tell me about the closet. . . ."

The angels of *Touched,* like their compatriots in the angel books, must do damage control for God, who has developed a reputation as just another abusive patriarch. "There are a lot of fathers out there giving kids a bad impression of what the real Father is like," muses the angel Tess. But the show's own impression of fatherhood is revealing. The angels of "Touched," like the good social workers they are, are keen on promoting a new consciousness of male identity, premised on confessional talk about one's feelings. Again and again, candidates for angelic ministration are informed by the angels that they have emotional problems that they cannot express.

Thus, in one episode, we are introduced to Colonel Victor Walls, a parody of stolid self-containment: informed that his eldest son has just been killed in Bosnia, his only response is to explode in anger at his disconsolate younger son, an ensign, telling him, "Soldiers don't cry." But Dad, the son replies, my brother has just been killed. "Dis-missed," hollers the unfeeling patriarch. But by the end of the show, after Tess and her winged retinue have intervened to correct his presumed emotional deprivation, Colonel Walls has become Robert Bly. At a flag-decked military ceremony bestowing full honors on his dead son, the colonel bursts into loud tears. "I have forgotten many things," he tells his listeners. "I've forgotten that the army is not my family. My family is my family. I promise I will never again forget who I am." Then, in a fit of divinely inspired tribalism, he repudiates his Americanized name—as the angels, who believe in the importance of "preserving tradition," have been urging him to do. "I am no longer Colonel Walls," he cries. "I am

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Colonel Victor Paredes. And I will never again forget to express the love that I feel in my heart for my *hijo*, Tomasino." And with that, the colonel's son bounds to the podium to enfold his weeping dad in a bear hug, as the angels in the front row beam in tenderness and pride.

Martha Williamson's angels are liberals (haven't the show's conservative admirers noticed?); and they do not shy away from giving specific, politically correct advice. In one episode, the angel Monica rebukes a father who is displeased with his son's announcement that he is gay. "God wants you to accept Tony for who he is," she tells him. "What's an angel from God doing on the side of a queer?" the father retorts. "Nothing made by God is queer," the angel fires back. "God loves all his creations." With the help of these dazzling beings, who are perennially cropping up at his side to instruct him on tolerance and envelop him in their bright and kindly light, it isn't long before Tony's bigoted dad comes round. "I love you, Tony," he says, full of tears, full of smiles. "And I know God does, too."

Monica is a "caseworker angel," bent on "saving souls, families, and futures." There is also a Native American angel, a streetwise Hispanic angel named Raphael, and a Downs Syndrome angel, played by a teenage actor named Chris Burke. For the fall season, CBS has promised "the introduction of additional angels who will cover different demographic groups." Heaven, too, must look more like America.

The show's writers sometimes go so far as to depict their political villains as the agents of Satan. In one episode, a baker named Matthew finds himself embroiled in controversy after he proclaims his belief that the recent murder of a black law student was a "hate crime." The most prominent skeptic of this view is a garage attendant who believes that the motive was burglary rather than bias, who counsels the citizenry to "wait until all the facts are in" before taking to the streets—and he is eventually exposed as the Devil himself! In the episode's climactic showdown, the baker Matthew unmasks the true identity of the Beast, whom he blames for his own incipient bigotry. "I don't know what it's like to be black or Asian or Mexican," he complains to Satan. "That's because," he says contritely, "I've been hearing your voice my whole life. And I have to confess something—I've listened. And now I'm a prejudiced man." The garage attendant, who by now has morphed into a frothing fiend from hell, admits that he is no friend of tolerance. "God created diversity," he hisses. "God is the source of your problem." But the righteous townfolk will have none of this; at the urging of the angels, they gather in the town square, waving aloft freshly-baked baguettes as they command Satan to be gone. The local policeman is so moved by this display that he proudly slaps handcuffs on two locals. "You're under arrest for a hate crime," he tells them.

In another episode, the angel Tess advises her erring client that God wants him to stop working for the Fairchild Tobacco Company, and to quit smoking. In this instance Tess takes the terrestrial form of a lawyer for the plaintiffs, who are pushing a lawsuit claiming damage from secondhand smoke. "In my practice," she explains in her opening statement, "I prefer the truth to be told." (The angel as lawyer: in Hollywood, they call this a stretch.) Just before closing arguments, Tess pulls opposing counsel outside in the hallway and begins to glow. "I am an angel," she tells him. "And God has a message for you, baby.... There's no profit to be gained by selling your soul." "Let me get this straight," the lawyer stammers. "God wants me to walk back into that courtroom and throw away my future?" "No," croons the angel. "God wants to you to go in there and take your future back while you have a chance." She then plucks the lit cigarette gently from his hand. "All I ever wanted was to belong," the lawyer chokes.

Touched by an Angel, then, is the sheerest propaganda. But its political propaganda is not the most offensive thing that it purveys. This show, and the other angel shows, and the angel books, are proliferating something much worse. It is something close to a cynical optimism. Evil, misfortune, even death: in this upbeat cosmos, all may be avoided or reversed. Tragedy is nothing but a plot device. Pain is real only so that it may be repealed. Rescue is inevitable. Inconclusiveness and uncertainty are banished.

This is psychological propaganda. It is not an encouraging sign about the sense of reality in America that there are angels everywhere. But these are not angels, really. They are demons, the typical demons of the counterfeit world of American television. For it is not happiness that they teach. It is illusion; and a stupid impatience with hardships and sufferings that will not disappear soon, or ever. It is certainly not true that God likes to write happy endings. And it is certainly not true that fun is the most difficult adventure of all. Even in America. •

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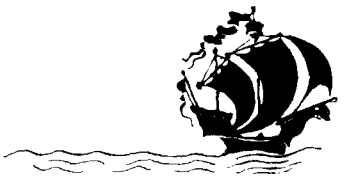

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Nature and the morality of family size.

The Perfectionist

By Margaret Talbot

This is an auspicious time for shallowness. Seriousness—and moral seriousness especially—is so rare these days that we are inclined to cut all sorts of slack for those who seem to possess it. The appearance of hard thinking is increasingly mistaken for the thing itself. Attitudes more and more do the work of arguments. Sincerity, solemnity, sanctimony: these are now the marks of moral and intellectual elevation; and the feeling of elevation is what matters. After all, logical and empirical rigor are so unedifying. And there is already so much cynicism loose in the land.

This is an auspicious time, therefore, for a moralist such as Bill McKibben. He seems like such fine and edifying company. He cares so much. Never mind that he may strike us as a bit precious, a bit self-regarding in his various renunciations and refusals. We all know people a little like him, and we are timid about criticizing them, too. We all have friends or relatives who periodically declare that Christmas or Hanukah have become too commercialized (who, in the materialist madness of boom-time America, would deny it?), and therefore they will be boycotting the holidays, which is to say, not giving us any presents. (The adherents of Voluntary Simplicity, a diffuse movement of affluent Americans who have decided that they can live better by buying less and band together on the Internet for self-congratulatory chats about the frisson of frugality, like to call this "non-gifting.") And we have all met the sort of people who will announce that the world is already overloaded with the human pollutants otherwise known as children, and so they have made the decision not to reproduce.

Privately, we may wonder whether these are the right sacrifices, or even whether, for these particular people, they are sacrifices at all. We may wonder whether a 3,000-page Web site devoted to Voluntary Simplicity, or a series of best-selling books on the same topic (all duly promoted by multicity author tours, point-of-purchase displays, and the like) quite embody the Shaker-like humility to which their votaries lay claim. We may ask whether the very notion of voluntary simplicity is itself an expression of overrefinement, as inseparable from advanced consumerist civilization as, say, the ideal of a pristine wilderness is from the culture that dreamed *it* up. We may even wonder—privately, again, when the effect of all that earnestness has worn off—whether some of the non-gifters or the non-breeders might be thought of as, well, cheap or selfish. ("I got caught up in the 'remember when' of being disappointed by others and I decided to be very limited as to giving," confided one non-gifting Internet chatterer. "I splurged on a gift for my granddaughter, asked my parents to share the cost, which they did, and observed that when opened, there was a temper-tantrum from my three-year-old granddaughter.")

Maybe One:
A Personal and Environmental Argument for Single-Child Families
by Bill McKibben
(Simon and Schuster, 254 pp., $23)

But since this skepticism may strike us as we wander the aisles of Toys R Us, feeling free-handed and maybe a little guilty, we probably won't admit to it out loud. I mean, we're the problem, aren't we? And so a set of ideas about what constitutes the virtuous life will escape the scrutiny that it deserves. It's not as if panting consumerism or the environmental implications of population growth are trivial topics. Quite the contrary. So we may be inclined to say of anyone who speaks dourly enough of these topics, bless their delicate, prickly, abstemious souls, and their gifts in our name to charities of their choice, and their deeply committed childlessness. Let them do as they please. All that we ask is that they don't start holding themselves up as models for the rest of us.

Except that so often that's just what they do. Consider Bill McKibben. He began his writing career a decade ago as a nature-loving journalist who chronicled environmental depredation, and that is what he still does. With each of his books—he has written four and a fifth is on the way—McKibben's tone has become less reportorial and more personal, less analytical and more homiletical. It's as though John Muir had clambered down Half Dome to sit at the feet of Robert Fulghum.

McKibben's first book, *The End of Nature* (1989), was the first general interest work to explain the threat of global climate change, and it did so with clarity and conviction. Still, it had its McKibbenish flaws. One could argue, along with some other students of the subject, that *The End of Nature* was marred by its embrace of the sort of eco-dualism in which the human and the natural are seen as utterly separate and inevitably at odds. Nature is dead and man is the perp, for any and all manipulation of the natural world is a violation of its essence. (Never mind that conservation itself is a manipulation of nature.) Thus, in a trenchant essay called "The Trouble with Wilderness," the historian William Cronon has written rather witheringly that the McKibbenish perspective is possible

> only if we accept the wilderness premise that nature, to be natural, must also be pristine—remote from humanity and untouched by our common past. In fact, everything we know about environmental history suggests that people have been manipulating the natural world on various scales for as long as we have a record of their passing. Moreover, we also have unassailable evidence that many of the environmental changes we now face also occurred quite apart from human intervention at one time or another in the earth's past. The point is not that our current problems are trivial, or that our devastating effects on the earth's ecosystems should be accepted as inevitable or "natural." It is rather that we seem unlikely to make progress in solving these problems if we hold up to ourselves as the mirror of nature a wilderness we ourselves cannot inhabit. To do so is merely to take to a logical extreme the paradox that was built into wilderness from the beginning: if nature dies because we enter it, then the only way to save nature is to kill ourselves.

These are serious objections. The point is not only that an overly pious view of nature can actually inspire a

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debilitating fatalism about the prospects for preserving it. Cronon's criticism suggests a more far-reaching problem: the sort of thinking in which a theological awe of nature is supposed to furnish a basis for human ethics. Such thinking is now widespread; but humanist philosophers have been warning against this fallacy at least since Mill, and with good reason. For there is nothing moral in nature—nothing, that is, that we have not ascribed to it.

There is beauty in nature, beauty unbounded, but there is no justice and there is no mercy. "Either it is right that we should kill because nature kills," Mill wrote in his great essay on nature, "torture because nature tortures; ruin and devastate because nature does the like; or we ought not to consider at all what nature does, but what it is good to do." The urge to restore nature, to undo the damage that humans have done to the environment, is itself an impulse of culture. It is a supremely civilized—which is to say, a supremely unnatural—urge.

Its philosophical fallacy notwithstanding, *The End of Nature* was full of useful information. It was also pretty free of the exemplary presence of its author. The same, alas, cannot be said of McKibben's more recent writings. Increasingly the subject of Bill McKibben's books has been the rightness of the choices made by Bill McKibben. In *The Age of Missing Information*, he found that he had been right to abstain from television. Up in the Adirondacks, in that patch of primeval neo-wilderness to which McKibben and his wife had retreated, the reception was lousy; but after watching thousands of hours of randomly taped TV broadcasts mailed to him by more corruptible friends with cable, McKibben was able to reassure himself that he wasn't missing a thing.

It was an ordeal, of course; not even the moldiest couch potato takes in eighteen hours a day of television. Yet the experiment paid off, insofar as it allowed McKibben the satisfaction of confirming what he knew all along. "What keeps me more truly in touch with the world," he asked rhetorically, "watching all this TV, or taking a simple walk in the woods?" To which his reader might reply with a question of her own: By what artificial dichotomy must television and nature, information and contemplation, technology and spirituality, cancel one another out? It was only McKibben who was asking us to choose.

In *Hundred Dollar Holiday*, another manual of moral improvement that Simon and Schuster has announced for next winter, McKibben appears to discover that he is also right to spend less money at Christmas, and that the rest of us ought to follow his antimaterialist example. As the publisher's catalog explains, "a more satisfying and meaningful Yule could be had by making it, financially, at least, a far more modest affair." Now there's a revelation suitable for needle-pointing. If there is anyone out there to whom this hoary platitude has not yet occurred, there is surely no book in the world that will enlighten him.

I would like to know, though, what McKibben has to say about the jobs that would be lost—starting with minimum-wage retail positions—if all of the privileged Americans at whom his exhortations are directed quit throwing their money around at Christmas. There is something so privileged about such renunciations of privilege. And the same question may be posed more generally to McKibben's kindred spirits in the Voluntary Simplicity movement. Disdain the market all you like, but we cannot all live by bartering our lightly used Armani and growing our own arugula.

The most egregious of McKibben's sermons, though, is certainly his current one. In *Maybe One*, McKibben concludes that he and his wife were right to stop with just one child, and that the rest of us ought to do the same. The next fifty years "will be crucial to our planet's future," he writes. "[T]hey are the years that could so devastate the earth's biology that it will never again be able to support life as abundantly as it does at present." The best way McKibben now sees for us to limit the damage that humans wreak on the planet is to make the only child a "cultural norm."

In its broad outlines, McKibben's neo-Malthusianism is nothing new. What distinguishes him from other population doomsayers is his yuppieish determination to see moral virtue and the opportunity for self-betterment where they see only stark, terrible necessity. Saving the earth isn't enough? Apparently not. McKibben wants to convince us not only that one-child families are environmentally sound, but also that they are psychologically enriching—superior, in certain important ways, to the messier constellations of bigger families.

The "real reason" he did the research for this book, McKibben explains, bore no relation to the planet. "I did it because of Sophie, my four-year-old daughter. I wanted to make sure that growing up without brothers or sisters would not damage her spirit or her mind. That's why the first chapters of this book have nothing to do with the environment and everything to do with kids." As a preamble to a manifesto of sorts, this is rather bizarre. For if the population crisis is as grave as McKibben portrays it, then the psychological niceties of the singleton status are irrelevant. And if it is not as grave as he portrays it, then why get into the business of defining a politically correct family size at all? Why try to dictate for others what is, or ought to be, a fiercely intimate choice?

To his credit, McKibben asks himself these questions, too. He agonizes that he and his wife did not make the deep ecological decision to forgo children altogether. "What eventually made up our minds was largely simple desire; like most, though certainly not all, people we felt some need deeper than deep to raise and nurture a child. Anything else may simply be justification." He offers the acknowledgement (it is a little stiff, but at least it is there) that "this book may not persuade most readers to limit themselves to one child—there are many deep factors involved in that decision." And he returns again and again to the idea that we are living in a "special moment," a fifty-year moment of truth during which we can open up more of a margin for environmental error and experimentation if we in affluent America have fewer children.

Of course, the attentive reader will recall that in affluent America we already

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have fewer children, fewer than we used to have and fewer than our counterparts have in the developing world. The fertility rate in the United States first sank below what demographers call the replacement level—roughly 2.1 children per woman—in 1973. Since then, the American birth rate has risen slowly back to replacement levels, but this is a minor increase in comparison to the soaring fertility rates of the late nineteenth century and the more recent baby-boom period. "Few demographers would forecast either a resurgence of fertility equivalent to the baby boom of 1940-1957," the demographers Douglas Anderton, Richard Barrett, and Donald Bogue write in *The Population of the United States,* "or a dramatic fall in fertility to below the replacement level in the near future. Instead, the likely prospect seems to be small ripples in a plateau hovering either just below or at the replacement level."

The reasons for this are fairly clear, and they hinge on the changing role of women. Generally speaking, the more women work outside the home, and the higher the professional status they achieve, the more likely they are to postpone childbearing and the fewer children they are likely to have. (High divorce rates in the United States probably also contribute to lower birth rates.) The reality, then, is that most of us already live in smaller families. As Anderton, Barrett, and Bogue put it, "Only 10 percent of married-couple families contained 3 or more children in 1992.... The trend since 1980 is towards an increase in childless families and a reduction in large numbers of children present in families."

Today, roughly one in four American families has just one child, compared to one in ten in the 1950s. And if you want to measure this new fertility regime in terms of attitudes rather than numbers, you can do that, too. Twenty-three times in the last 60 years, the Gallup Poll has asked Americans for their opinion about the ideal size of a family. In 1938, 66 percent of those polled said three or more children in a family was ideal. In 1962—the last hiccup of the baby boom—an astonishing 80 percent did. In 1997, just 36 percent of those polled thought three or more kids would be swell.

There is a population problem of sorts in the United States, but it is not one that can be conceived of in McKibben's terms, as a problem of human bulk. The answer to this population problem, moreover, is not a general thinning of the herd. Our problem is that half of all the pregnancies in the United States are unintended; and so the children who result from these pregnancies (about half of them come to term) are probably less likely to get the love and the care they need than children who are planned. "When people are born whose parents don't want them," as the demographer Joel Cohen succinctly observes, "there is definitely a population problem."

These unintended pregnancies are more common than average among the young and among the poor. Yet impoverished teenagers are not the group most likely to read McKibben's book, or to make decisions about their lives on the basis of abstract arguments about global climate change. And among his likely readers—the college-educated, the eco-savvy—what McKibben calls the "taboo" on one-child families has long since broken down. Only children are more common than they used to be, especially in the higher income brackets; and the advice-giving apparatus that attends modern parenthood has caught up with this reality.

It is not at all unusual to flip through magazines aimed at striving parents and find an article such as "Only Kids Aren't Lonely ... and other Reassuring Research for Parents of One Child" (*Parents* magazine). Popular how-to books such as *What to Expect in the Toddler Years* tell parents that "children aren't like potato chips; you can stop at just one, if you want to." (The authors go on to tout research showing that "only children performed better academically than children with siblings, and were strongly represented among the population of highly successful people.") So McKibben is really preaching to the converted.

But he is ready with an answer. It is true that affluent First Worlders do not drop big litters, but it is also true that affluent First Worlders suck up more resources. One kid in Larchmont is more of a drag on Mother Nature than six kids in Lahore. We tromp on the earth, while others are obliged (by grinding poverty, it must be said, rather than by Earth Firstism) to tiptoe. They are woodland sprites; we are teletubbies. As McKibben unflatteringly puts it, "The richest tenth of Americans—the people most likely to be reading this book—each emit eleven tons of carbon annually.... My daughter, age four at the time of this writing, has already used more stuff, added more waste to the environment than most of the world's residents in a lifetime."

What a costly little girl! But if this is the problem, then surely the solution lies in renewed attempts at conservation—recycling, fuel efficiency, solar energy and other corrections yet to come. On this point, however, it turns out that McKibben has become something of a fatalist. All those changes in lifestyle and technology happen too slowly to make a difference, he believes. Worse, they may not happen at all. We are naïve to keep putting our faith in them: "You'd think offhand that compared to changing fertility—the number of kids we bear—changing consumption patterns would be a breeze," he writes. "Fertility, after all, seems *biological*—hard-wired into us in deep Darwinian ways. But in fact, I would guess that it's easier to change fertility than lifestyle. For better or for worse, we live in a culture that can say 'that's enough' in regard to children at least as easily as it can regarding cars."

"It's easier to change fertility than lifestyle": a purer expression of the yuppie view of the world was never uttered. And if this is so, if it is really true that we would sooner interfere with our commitment to children than with our taste in cars, then surely this is for the worse—so much for the worse, in fact, that we ought not to resign ourselves to it. There is something deeply dispiriting about McKibben's straitened sense of what is possible. For the yearning to have children, and the having of children and the caring for them, are part of what make us believe in the continuity of life, and gives us hope in a future; part of what frees us from the bonds of self; part of what ties us to this earth and to everyone else on it. More than work, more than nature, more even than God, children are what confer meaning on the lives of most people around the world. Before we surrender all this—and restricting yourself to one child when you long for more children and you firmly believe that a family is properly comprised of sisters and brothers *is* a surrender—why not try to make the kind of changes that do not violate something so fundamental?

McKibben's homey moralism disguises the fact that he has surprisingly little confidence in moral agency. If moral agency were enough, then he would not have had a vasectomy, which is, after all, an anatomical fix intended to vanquish forever the temptation, if it is one, to procreate. Yet McKibben describes his vasectomy proudly, and alas, in some detail: "So I sat on the table, and pulled my pants down my ankles, and he swabbed my scrotum with iodine ('the iodine needs to be a little warm—the last thing we want is shrinkage before we start') and then he injected a slug of anesthetic into each side of my testicles. Yes, it was a needle down there, but no, it didn't hurt much; by chance I'd spent the previous afternoon in the dentist's chair and this

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was much less painful. (And no flossing!)" I suppose it was noble of McKibben to go for the operation himself; vasectomies are less invasive than tubal ligations, the procedure that his wife would have had to endure to achieve the same end. (Women generally do most of the worrying about birth control.) Noble, and no flossing!

McKibben wants to persuade his readers that there would be no real loss entailed in making one-child families the norm. For him, this means first and foremost overcoming what he calls, a bit melodramatically, the "prejudice" against only children. And this in turn means assembling recent psychological research showing that singletons grow up to be no more spoiled or selfish or lonely or misanthropic than children with siblings.

To do so, McKibben relies on the work of a psychologist named Toni Falbo who, along with her colleague Denise Polit, reviewed 141 studies on the personalities, the peer relations, the intelligence, and the achievement of only children. They concluded that only children scored slightly higher than other groups on some measures, especially those having to do with achievement and motivation in school. In almost all other areas, they were virtually indistinguishable from children with siblings.

In a way, this conclusion is not surprising; or what is surprising is how easy it is to assimilate. For if there is a prejudice against only children, it is not the sort of prejudice that slams doors in their faces or girds anyone's heart against them. It is more like the notion that redheads have tempers: you may vaguely believe it, but you are happy enough to have it overturned. I am certainly content to accept Falbo's findings, and to credit the obvious explanations that only children might do better in school on average because they get more of their parents' attention and because they live in households in which adults set the tone. It is clear, too, that if only children risk growing up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance, they risk it less now than ever, since so many more kids of all kinds are in day care at early ages.

Alas, McKibben does not stop with such sensible reassurances about onlies. He crows over their achievements—"disproportionate numbers of only borns have had their faces on the cover of *Time*"—even when he slyly admits that such evidence is anecdotal. (The cover of *Time* is not supposed to matter in the woods.) Worse, McKibben's spirited defense of singletons leads him to pathologize the sibling relationship, which he portrays as a teeming petri dish of resentments. "[A]s more children enter the family, there's a dilution of resources," he writes "Everyone tries to give their second, third, and fourth child as much of their attention as their first, but there are only so many hours in the day, only so much stress a father can tolerate, only so many Frisbees a mother can throw."

This sounds true, and it probably feels true, to many parents; but it cannot actually be true that younger siblings get consistently less attention from their parents. If it were, then psychological woes of all kinds would be more liberally distributed among younger siblings than among older ones. Anyway, the particular size of the family matters. In a family of eight children, somebody probably will be overlooked, but there is no reason why this should necessarily be the case in a family of two or three children.

Of sibling rivalry, McKibben notes bathetically that "sometimes the hurts go on forever: Bank and Kahn [the authors of a book called *The Sibling Bond*] tell the story of a chronically unhappy older sister who feels perpetually anxious and driven and cannot understand why she and her sister still don't get along." And when sibs form especially strong ties, he says, it is usually only to compensate for a lousy relationship with their parents. "Your sister can be, in other words, a kind of fallback mechanism, a relationship of last resort." This seems to me a rather bleak and attenuated way to describe what for many people is a vital and joyous and irreplaceable bond. It is always hard to generalize about such things, and it is certainly true that siblings can form powerful trauma bonds if they come from families where their parents abused or neglected them; but my own experience has taught me that remarkably close relationships between brothers and sisters can and do flourish under happier circumstances. (Even if you like and love your parents, they are still a source of bafflement, and who besides your sister or your brother will try, with a curiosity like your own, to fig-

Calendar Girl

The nymph sits in her cave, naked.
The deckchair lusts after the strange trees.
She cups her chin: *I love you.*
Each evening I return to her though
the divorcee next door who sunbathes on her lawn
has a big chest with a few
black hairs. When I take the nymph to school
& unroll her she says: *I love him.*
She's keen on sports. Me too. When I get home
I forget I'm tired, but tired I am.
She has that effect. I crawl along my branch
like a chameleon, watching her with my
swivel eyes. My tongue is sticky.
She understands. I watch her try to move.
She twitches. Suddenly she's
outside the window. My fingers open.
Something is undone before it's done.
The divorcee. I stand up so fast I knock
the binoculars off the National Geographics
& onto the floor. Freeze. *Turn on the radio.*
It shouts something about cold light & old men.
She smelled of skin. I know how to swim.
Voulezvous swimmez avec moi? Ah,
she's left her face in the mirror.
I lick it. She would understand. Now
watch me ride onto your lawns, destroy
your cities, rape your women till they
glint like large diamonds. It starts to rain.
Smell of beans downstairs on the stove.
I look out. She has me
where she wants me.

Brian Swann

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ure them out with you?)

The pitfalls of sibling relationships—jealousy, competition, the anxiety that one loves more than one is loved, the eventuality that your cute new cardigan will be pilfered from your closet—are to some extent the pitfalls of attachment to others. They are nothing worse than the cost of loving. And when McKibben goes on to cite the incidence of sibling incest ("[S]ometimes the hurts are very deep. Sibling incest has been estimated to be at least five times as frequent as parent-child incest, and many researchers think that's an underestimate"), presumably as a way of saying that sibling relationships are more trouble than they're worth, he loses me entirely.

Anyway, answering for the psychological health of only children does not exhaust the argument about the morality of a one-child norm. This is grimly clear in McKibben's chapter on China, "the nation with the world's largest population of only children, as well as the source of some of the most potent images of their wickedness." If all those number-one sons are not "spoiled," whatever that means, then we can charge ahead with a commitment to having tiny litters, free of the worry that a preponderance of onlies might change our culture for the worse. And what do you know, the useful Toni Falbo has done a study in China, too; and she has found, again, that onlies are pretty much like everybody else. The Chinese are not producing a generation of "little emperors," after all!

In fact, it is hard to consider Falbo's study definitive proof of anything, given what one imagines the cultural barriers might be between an American social scientist brandishing questionnaires about self-esteem and a population of provincial Chinese children for whom onlyness is already the norm. More importantly, a study such as this one misses what would seem to be the more urgent point about China's population regime. The real trouble with China's one-child policy is not that it may result in the cossetting of some boys, but that it has apparently resulted in the abandonment or the infanticide of many girls. The distortion of morality that results when a heavy-handed state intrudes on the private sphere is what matters here. McKibben's Chinese example is grotesque.

Not that McKibben wants a state policy mandating one child per family. He takes some pains to make this clear. No, he wants only to appeal to our higher selves, to the saint in us that will forsake our deepest and in some ways our most generous longings in order to do the right thing—or what McKibben thinks is the right thing—for the planet. Yet there is something anti-humanistic in such a message, something morally troubling about demanding such extraordinary commitments of ordinary people as a matter of course. For it really is extraordinary to give up one's idea of a family on the chance that we may emit a little less carbon dioxide, to deny parents the hope that their children will enrich one another's lives long after they themselves are dead, and to turn a primary human bond into a relic. Surely this is too much to ask—unless, of course, there is an emergency, and it may be claimed with some certainty that we are facing an extraordinary population crisis.

Are we? Maybe. The pace of world population growth has certainly accelerated dramatically in the last century, so dramatically that we cannot know what impact it will have on the earth or the quality of human life. It took until 1830 for the earth's population to get to 1 billion, but it took only one hundred years for it to reach 2 billion and only 45 years for it to reach 4 billion. On the other hand, the rate of global population growth hit a peak in 1965 and has now fallen to 1.5 percent a year. The total fertility rate worldwide dropped by nearly two-fifths between 1955 and 1995; from about 5 children per woman to about 3.1 children per woman. In one scenario, advanced by a respected Austrian demographer named Wolfgang Lutz and endorsed by others, the world's population will peak at 10.6 billion in the later half of the next century and then begin to shrink. A number of leading demographers now dispute the global doomsday scenario, and some of them are worrying about a population implosion.

The paradox for environmentalists such as McKibben is that these numbers are falling largely as the result of social and economic development in the Third World—that is, as a result of the sort of development that means more cars, more factories, more pollution, more living heavily on the land. McKibben himself is a bit coy about this: "It's relatively easy to explain why populations grew so fast after World War II, it's much harder to explain why that growth is now slowing." But that isn't exactly true. A strong scholarly consensus supports the observation that economic and social development—in Europe and America as they industrialized, and more recently in Asia—have tended to bring reductions in family size.

Development, and an improvement in the status of women, has been generally more successful than coercion or exhortation in reducing fertility. In a way, this is not a mystery. People have fewer children, Amartya Sen writes, "when they have some basic education, know about family planning methods and have access to them, do not readily accept a life of persistent drudgery, and are not deeply anxious about their economic security." They also have fewer children when health care and sanitary conditions improve to the point that babies no longer die quite so regularly: if parents can count on more of their children surviving, they need not have "extras" as an insurance policy against infant mortality. "In country after country," Sen observes, "the birth rate has come down with more female education, the reduction of mortality rates, the expansion of economic means and security, and greater public discussion of ways of living." Sen points out that we cannot even say with certainty that China's one-child policy lowered the birth rate any further than it would have been lowered by development alone.

McKibben is right when he says that population prediction is a notoriously unreliable business. Yet the ambiguity can cut both ways—and in the past it has cut most often against pessimists such as himself. From Malthus onward, the field is littered with failed forecasts of demographic armageddon, most of them based on the idea that population will inevitably outstrip food supply. In 1968, in his bestselling book *The Population Bomb*, Paul Ehrlich thundered that "the battle to feed humanity is already lost, in the sense that we will not be able to prevent large-scale famines in the next century." In that same year, an equally popular and even scarier book called *Famine-1975!* predicted mass hunger worldwide in less than decade. Doom galore; but the fact is that food production has consistently outpaced population since Malthus's time, and in recent decades food prices worldwide have been falling.

Of course, even if the demographic Cassandras have been wrong in the past, they may be right now. And even if they were wrong about food supply, they may be right about the threat to the environment. The trouble is that we really don't know how many people is too many people. Estimates of the earth's "carrying capacity," or the number of humans it can sustain, have ranged in recent decades from fewer than a billion to more than a trillion. Such elasticity is probably unavoidable, since both "carrying capacity" and "overpopulation" are essentially subjective terms.

It makes sense to talk about carrying

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capacity when you are assessing a habitat for boll weevils or wolves; but it makes no sense at all in relation to humans, who are capable of adapting and altering both their culture and their physical environment, and so of defying almost any formula that might settle the matter. (Also they vary from nation to nation and culture to culture in their use of resources.) The number of people that the earth can support depends on how we on the earth want to live, on what we want to consume and on what we regard as a crowd. Population density is not an adequate measure, since we can easily point to densely packed cities (Amsterdam, Tokyo) that are considered among the most functional and livable cities in the world.

For some environmentalists, it seems to come down to an aesthetic judgement. They like the idea of what Dave Foreman, the founder of Earth First!, calls the "Big Outside." They are suckers for grandeur, snobs for solitude. McKibben typically complains that there are crowds at every national park and state campground. (Every one? Two summers ago, on a road trip from San Francisco to Bend, Oregon, I stopped in several national forests and campgrounds where I scarcely saw a another soul.) And he regards this overcrowding as a spiritual danger. "We can live without big wilderness," he frets, "but it's not clear we can live as Americans, not in the way we have in the past." We must be singletons in the face of the sublime, too.

But do we really wish to continue to "live as Americans" in this regard? Surely it would be best for the environment if Americans stopped thinking of nature in a certain American way, that is, if we ceased to regard nature as the antidote to culture, as a people-free zone where some of us go to flex our muscles and save our souls. Maybe it would better if we gave up our Ansel Adams fantasy of unsullied nature, so that if it isn't sublime, well, we might as well turn it into a strip mall. The choice between arcadia and Monsanto is a spurious choice. For it is a primary fact of our history that the wild and the cultivated have blended together more or less successfully, if not altogether seamlessly. The human mastery of nature is hardly an occasion for shame; and it is hardly incompatible with a sense of awe.

Indeed, it is McKibben's proposal that marks a collapse of awe. This critic of the liberties taken with nature takes liberties with nature. He is licensed by perfectionism. Like all perfectionists about human life, however, McKibben seems unattractively detached from it. His consecration to the ideal has caused him to demean

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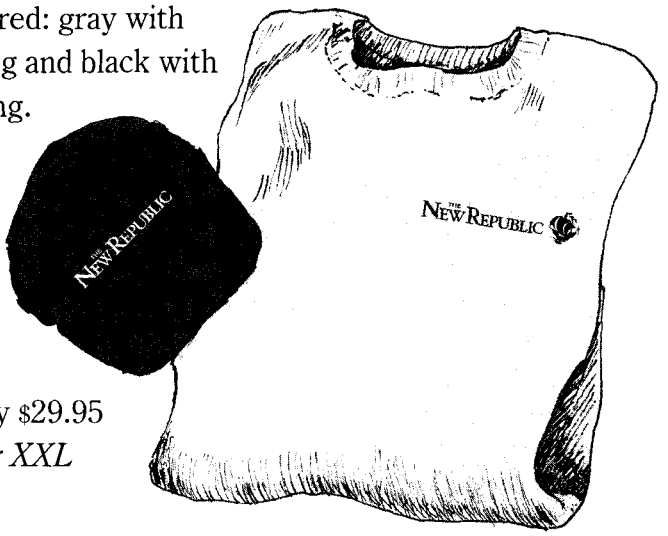

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the real—the real existence of ordinary people, who love their children and do not hate the rain forest, who strive to live morally on this side of sainthood. McKibben puts me in mind of Orwell's strictures against Gandhi: "The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one *is* sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals.... In this yogi-ridden age, it is too readily assumed that 'non-attachment' is not only better than a full acceptance of earthly life, but that the ordinary man only rejects it because it is too difficult: in other words, that the average human being is a failed saint. It is doubtful whether this is true. Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings."

McKibben is the yuppie yogi. He is irritating not only because he is so wrong, but also because he is so sanctimonious. And his sanctimony has nothing to do with the truth or the falsity of his beliefs. After all, one may hold a true belief and not be sanctimonious. Sanctimony is something more. It is the promotion of a belief into a judgment of those who hold or do not hold that belief. In this way, the distinction between rightness and righteousness disappears. Yet the distinction should be reasserted against McKibben. He is righteous, but not right. It is delightful to be a worse person than he is. •

The Good Old Bad Old Days

By Jeffrey Herf

Parting from Phantoms: Selected Writings, 1990-1994 by Christa Wolf translated and annotated by Jan van Heurck

(University of Chicago Press, 315 pp., $24.95)

Though communism collapsed everywhere in Europe in 1989, the German Democratic Republic was the only one of the communist nation-states to disappear completely and become absorbed into another country, the Federal Republic of Germany. In the essays, the lectures, and the interviews collected in this book, Christa Wolf, the most prominent novelist and essayist to emerge from East Germany, and a leading member of the loyal opposition to the old communist regime, expresses her regrets about that disappearance. In her treatment of the collapse of communism, she conveys the sense of the utter defeat of her political hopes, lashes out in anger and defensiveness at the victors' "phantoms" that offer a distorted picture of the GDR, and attempts to provide examples of the better aspects of East Germany.

Wolf wrote to and for critics of the East German government who accepted the fundamental postulate of official anti-fascism. It was East Germany, and not West Germany, that had truly faced the Nazi past, purged its elites, and built a regime based on memory rather than amnesia about the crimes of Nazism. Hence Wolf rejects the replacement of these East German realities with the idea that the GDR was "nothing but a repellent monotony of oppression and scarcity" and that "no one in the eastern provinces has anything to be proud of...." She believes that this notion rests to a great extent on West German ignorance. In place of these phantoms of oppression, she recalls the legacy of antifascism and the quietly dissenting intelligentsia who nurtured the critical spirit that contributed to the revolution of 1989.

Wolf's pride in the GDR is evident in a fervent defense of the four decades of accomplishments of the East Berlin Academy of Arts. It comes through clearly in her admiring essay about Anna Seghers, the novelist and communist who was one of the leading cultural figures of East German antifascism. In 1992, Wolf expressed the hope that what Seghers's generation of communist intellectuals accomplished would not be "permanently consigned to oblivion." The same pride is evident, too, in the exchanges of letters reprinted here with Jürgen Habermas and Günter Grass, which display her sense of being part of a common tradition of critical leftist German intellectuals; and in her admiring discussion of the paintings of the Spanish-born East German painter Nuria Quevedo. Wolf wants to recall aspects of East German life that West Germans did not understand, owing to their political hostility (or to the successful efforts of the East German dictatorship to obscure these realities from outsiders—a cause that she does not examine).

For many of Wolf's East German compatriots, the collapse of the dictatorship and the dismantling of the ubiquitous Stasi provided a long overdue opportunity to speak publicly about the nature of the East German dictatorship, to do research in freshly opened archives, to say at last what was previously forbidden—in short, to seek the truth and to make it public. Yet, as her bitter essay "Wasteland Berlin 1990" makes evident, Wolf prefers to speak of being caught between "a hopeless past and a future without prospects—for many people." Rather than stress the value of truth for building a new polity and a new society, she focuses on how the revelations of the extent to which friends and families betrayed one another while failing to resist the government in the past were disabling. They left many

> unable to walk the hard path from dependency to independent adulthood now that they have seen the revelations about their nation, and awakening from euphoria have fallen prey to disappointment, depression, hate and self-hate verging on self-destruction? A lot of betrayal has taken place in this city and it is still going on.... There is a driven, anxious, unscrupulous life and activity going on here under the surface; everyone sells what he can, including himself.

Wolf is eloquent in describing this scoundrel time, but her tone leads one to ask if she would have preferred to learn less about the past.

In the early 1990s, Wolf might have used her prestige and her reputation to support dissidents seeking to uncover truths so long repressed. Instead, reeling from the loss of her country, she writes of East Germany that "I loved this country." The former dissident now speaks as one of the losers. This is not altogether surprising. In her dissidence to the old regime, Wolf was bound to it as well. No wonder she complains that "the people of the East are supposed to give up everything, not just what they

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found disturbing or unacceptable; they are being asked to deny, in retrospect, that their lives had value."

> I am among those who warned, long before October 3, 1990, that unification would make self-critical examination of our past much more difficult, insofar as unification amounted to the larger, wealthier part of Germany annexing the smaller, poorer part. At the time I had not yet realized the full extent of the West's attitude of defensiveness toward us, which borders on actual loathing. The tendencies to demonize the GDR, to turn it into a phantom and its inhabitants into monsters while disregarding history as much as possible, were only beginning to show themselves.

The result was that West Germans now had a view of the GDR that was "totally removed from reality," and this in turn was pushing former citizens of East Germany toward defensiveness and obstinacy. In such a situation, self-critical analysis was made "inexpressibly more difficult by attacks from ignorant or malevolent victors."

The reader of these essays (these apologetics, really) who is unfamiliar with Germany since unification might entertain the mistaken notion that the effort to grasp the truth about the East German past has been primarily the result of the efforts of West German victors. In fact, other leading members of the East German opposition, such as Rainer Eppelmann, Joachim Gauck, and Konrad Weiss, a few former members of the ruling party and its intellectual establishment, and former East German historians now at work at Humboldt University and at the Research Center in Contemporary History in Potsdam, have all performed pioneering work into the history of the East German dictatorship. Our knowledge of this regime—of its economic, social, cultural, and foreign policies—has grown enormously as a result of their efforts.

German unification entailed a purge of the old elites that far exceeded anything undertaken in the other ex-communist countries of Europe. And it proceeded—this is essential to understanding the bitterness of Wolf and others—with a thoroughness and a scope that contrasted sharply with West Germany's policy of reintegration of all but the most compromised of ex-Nazi German elites in the Adenauer era of the 1950s. Literally thousands of East German government officials, diplomats, soldiers, and industrial managers lost their power, their prestige, and their jobs—which were then filled by West Germans—in the years following German unification. This was the case also with researchers, editors, and professors. Departments of Marxism-Leninism were abolished. Large parts of faculties in the social sciences and history lost their jobs, and were replaced with historians and social scientists trained in West Germany who were studying the similarities and the differences between "the two German dictatorships." Now the embittered losers of German unification vote for the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor to the East German Socialist Unity Party, and criticize efforts to examine the repressive character of the old regime, especially when they come from the "Wessies." Wolf's book expresses the "Ossies'" mixture of apologia, defensiveness, and anger in the years after unification.

In her novel *The Quest for Christa T.*, which appeared in 1968, Wolf defended the right of her protagonist to a private life, a life of melancholy emotions and feelings that did not fit at all well with the heroic caricatures of Stalinist optimism. Especially since her dissent from official literary norms at the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party in 1965, Wolf occupied a space between official recognition and the deviant *Nischengesellschaft*, or "society of niches," in which she and others could criticize official culture and dream of a new and different—but still socialist—German Democratic Republic. In 1976, she added to her record of political incorrectness when she joined fifteen other East German writers to protest the expulsion from East Germany of the folk singer and poet Wolf Biermann. Though she herself briefly considered leaving, Wolf was among those who "stayed along with every Tom, Dick and Harry, every Hinz and Kunz in niches, under observation, in the small catastrophes of the TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY among people who did not know that Troy is falling."

For Wolf, the trauma of Nazism and the proclaimed antifascism of the East German regime was at the core of her reasons for staying and fighting for change from within. In the early 1950s, when she was in her twenties, she "met comrades who had come out of the concentration camps, out of the prisons, back from exile, impressive people—today I still believe they were among the most interesting people you could meet in Germany at that time—and our guilty conscience about them was another big reason for our commitment to their cause." Their cause was East German communism, its official antifascist legitimation, and its associated claim that in East Germany and only in East Germany was there a serious effort to confront the crimes of the Nazi past. For Wolf, the great aura that surrounded the founding generation precluded revolt, especially since the only German alternative appeared to be the Federal Republic.

The critical spirit that Wolf tried to foster was a critical spirit that drew on leftist utopianism. In her speech of November 4, 1989 in East Berlin, at the largest mass demonstration in the history of the GDR, Wolf said, "Picture this: Socialism arrives and no one goes away!" But this was not to come to pass. Instead, the writings collected in *Parting from Phantoms* document the collapse of these hopes and their replacement with a bitter and de-

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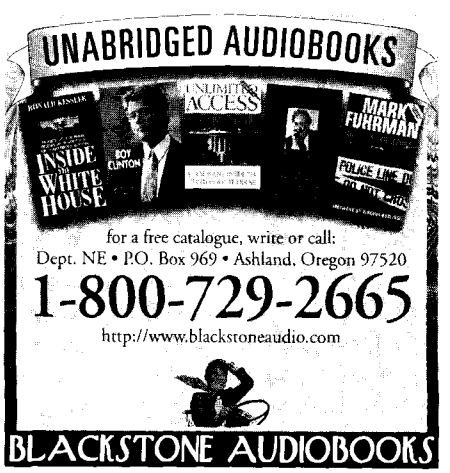

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spairing mood of defeat and lost opportunities. By the autumn of 1990, a year after the wall was no more, East Germany had ceased to exist, replaced with breathtaking speed by a unified Germany. Worse, at the time of the first free elections to be held in eastern Germany since 1933, when voters abandoned the East German leftist dissidents who had fought for a better socialism in the GDR in favor of Helmut Kohl's promises of market-driven prosperity, Wolf and others denounced German unification as an "*Anschluss*." An *Anschluss*!

In her speeches and her essays of the early 1990s, Wolf warned of a possible estrangement between West Germans and East Germans if, "in the rapid annexation of the GDR by the German Federal Republic ... East Germany's history is publicly suppressed...." At the same time, she acknowledged that the hopes of the oppositional intelligentsia for a "revolutionary revival of our country" after the fall of the old regime appear "to have been mistaken." Their hopes had collapsed because East German Communism lasted so long:

> Our uprising appears to have come years too late. The damage to many people and to the country runs too deep. The unbridled abuse of power has discredited and undermined the values in whose name the abuse occurred. In a period of a few weeks we have seen our chances to make a new start at an alternative society vanish before our eyes, and seen the very existence of our nation vanish with them. A defeat does not become less painful because you are able to explain the reasons for it; nor less disturbing, if it is a repetition of the past. Is this left-wing nostalgia?

But now other and strikingly nationalist sloganeers marched in the streets. With the end of dictatorship, literature and art were no longer "forced to do the work of the press." What seemed so daring before 1989 could now be expressed by the public. Wolf maintained that literature still had a public responsibility, a role "to investigate the blind spots in our past and to accompany us into our changing future."

In *Parting from Phantoms*, however, much of Wolf's ire is directed precisely against post-unification efforts to examine those blind spots. She fails to mention the most stunning and impressive statement of self-scrutiny to emerge from East German politics after 1989, namely the statement unanimously adopted in April, 1990, by the East German *Volkskammer*. In that statement, the first democratically elected parliament in East Germany denounced the policies of the German Democratic Republic toward the Jews and toward the state of Israel, asked the Jewish people for forgiveness for these policies, and promised to try to make up for forty years of East German hostility. The *Volkskammer* also accepted the burden of the Holocaust—something the West German government had done in 1951—as well as the burden of the crimes committed against the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during World War II, and expressed shame and regret for East German participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in summer 1968.

Here was the preeminent East German attempt to look at the most glaring blind spots of East German history. It preceded German unification by six months, and it was not at all the result of a slavish East German conformism in the process of an *Anschluss*. Given her stated desire to examine the blind spots of German history and do away with phantoms, it is puzzling that Wolf does not examine or identify with this most important first step in that direction, one that grew out of the East German opposition.

Wolf inveighs against demonization and phantoms, but she doesn't tell us which parts of the West German view of East Germany are false, or where Westerners have struck an improper balance between the Stasi and the Wall, on the one hand, and her dissenting intelligentsia on the other. Was it false, or an example of "demonization," to describe the GDR as a dictatorship; to point out that the Berlin Wall and the armed border literally made the country a giant prison hundreds of whose citizens were shot and killed while trying to escape; to reveal that East Germany left behind an environmental disaster on a scale that shocked West Germany's environmental Green Party, and an inefficient and obsolete industrial base that stunned Western economic experts who had naively believed East German economic statistics? Was the Stasi a phantom of the Western triumphalist imagination? Were the 2.7 million people who fled from East to West Germany between 1949 to 1961 also among the "ignorant and malevolent victors" who were utterly misinformed about East Germany as well? Did the Communist regime not suppress all political opposition and stifle intellectual and cultural freedom?

And then there is the matter of the Jews and the GDR. Christa Wolf devotes not a single sentence to this issue. In 1990, neo-Nazi vandals painted swastikas and wrote "Jew pig" on the graves of Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel. Shortly thereafter, in an introduction to a speech by the German literary critic Hans Mayer, Wolf wrote that "back in the early fifties, when you were a professor in Leipzig and I was a student, no one could have convinced us that this would happen." Yet Wolf must have been sufficiently well informed to have known something about the central blind spot in the history of East German antifascism, that is, its handling of "the Jewish question."

As an SED party member in the 1950s, or as an attendee at party conferences in that terrible period, Wolf must have read articles in *Neues Deutschland*, the party organ, alleging the existence of a vast and powerful international conspiracy of Jews, Zionists, and American imperialists whose purpose was to destroy communism in Europe. Among the generation of German Communists whom she admired as a young woman, she surely knew that many who returned from exile and from the concentration camps, Jews and non-Jews, were arrested, fired from party positions, or forced to flee to the West to avoid arrest. Some did so out of well-founded fears of Communist varieties of anti-Semitism during the "anti-cosmopolitan" purges.

Following the purges, Wolf may have attended or read of East German memorials to victims of fascism which marginalized or repressed the specifically Jewish dimension of Nazi criminality. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, she surely saw reports in the East German press of East German political leaders and diplomats traveling to Arab states when they were at war with Israel, supporting the "Zionism is racism" resolution in the United Nations in the 1970s, and thundering against the "the Tel Aviv-Bonn-Washington axis." She knew of Walter Ulbricht's famous speech during the Six Day War in 1967, in which he declared his support for the Arab states, and she must have read in the East German press about the subsequent twenty-five years of fervent and unswerving economic, diplomatic, and military support for Arab and Palestinian armed attacks on Israel.

The *Volkskammer* declaration of April 1990 fully acknowledged and expressed regret for this disgraceful history of German communist antagonism to the Jewish state, and for this refusal to offer financial restitution to the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. In these same years, however, Christa Wolf was so intent on defending the wonderful and misunderstood qualities of East Germany that she appears not to understand why well-informed observers—not "ignorant or malevolent victors"—would conclude that the policies of the East German government regarding Jewish matters were utterly despicable and morally inexcusable.

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The opening of the Ministry of State Security (Stasi) files at first revealed the extent to which the East German government had kept both Christa Wolf and her husband Gerhard under surveillance. Between 1969 and 1980, the Stasi had collected forty-three volumes of documents on the couple. (The surveillance continued, but the files collected after 1980 were either destroyed or stolen.) But Wolf's status as a victim suffered a severe blow in early 1993, when the Gauck office in Berlin, charged with overseeing the files of the Stasi, revealed that from 1959 to 1962 she had been also an "informal collaborator" with the Stasi, that is, an informant. In that capacity she reported on the political views of fellow writers and editors and thus aided in the Stasi's effort to enforce ideological conformity and ferret out deviations.

The Christa Wolf affair exploded in the German press. In the cultural pages of both liberal and conservative newspapers, some of the same journalists who had previously praised her courage and her work now denounced her collaboration and her refusal to have revealed it herself. She had written about her victimization by the Stasi in her novel *Was bleibt* (*What Remains*) in 1990, but she had remained silent about her own brief collaboration. And so the revelations were devastating. Given the relative brevity of her contact with the Stasi, her subsequent episodes of opposition, and the long period of surveillance to which she and her husband were subjected, Wolf could have responded to these revelations with a simple acknowledgement of the facts and an expression of regret. But she chose another course.

To be sure, parts of the German press were unwilling to examine the gray areas of life under dictatorship. But there were many others who, following decades of research and analysis of intellectual life under the Nazi regime, understood the compromises and the corruptions of intellectual life in a dictatorship, as well as West Germany's shortcomings in facing the Nazi past in the 1950s. Among these empathetic West Germans was Günter Gaus, a German television journalist and former representative of West Germany in East Berlin in the early years of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. In 1993, he interviewed Christa Wolf when she was a visiting fellow at the Getty Center in Santa Monica, and asked her about her involvement with the Stasi. This is what she told him:

> Of course it's absolutely clear to me that I could ease my position in certain quarters if I would display remorse and feelings of guilt. But I don't feel them.... I have a feeling of greater freedom because the only question facing me has been: Am I going to go along with the demagogues? Will I internalize this image of me that is being handed to the public? I knew I'd be lost if I did.

She responded to the Stasi revelations with hardboiled legalisms: "I can neither confirm nor deny whether I made the statements attributed to me in the Stasi reports...." She attributed her lack of candor to the terrible, arrogant, and ignorant West Germans. "You can't really be honest when you are living under conditions of a tribunal; I know that from my own example."

What were her fellow citizens to make of her response? Documents had made clear that she had collaborated with the Stasi. She expressed no regret over the episode, she did not try to make it understandable to those who admired her, she implicitly accused those who were revealing uncomfortable truths about the East German regime of being demagogues, she resorted to the language of evasion, of the hardened and experienced political infighter. Finally, she appeared to justify dishonesty and lack of candor by referring to the "conditions of a tribunal" created by German unification's aftermath. With evasions of that nature, her reputation for truth-telling about the East German past again suffered a severe blow.

Nowhere in these essays does Wolf express relief or happiness that a dictatorship is gone. Nor does she ask what the fate of the West German establishment would have been if Germany had been unified under East German auspices. Having lost the cold war, most of the members of the East German establishment lost their jobs, sometimes their reputations. But judging from the facts, not the phantoms, of the way the East German government dealt with its enemies and dissenters, it is clear that the political and intellectual establishment in the West would have lost not only their jobs but also their freedoms, and maybe their lives as well. One searches these essays in vain for an expression of relief that Wolf and her fellow former East Germans can now live without Stasi surveillance, and publish without worrying that some "ignorant and malevolent" cultural commissar will judge her or someone else's work unacceptable.

Wolf is not alone in her anger over German unification and defensiveness about the East German past. Despite the huge sums poured into economic reconstruction, the oft-promised economic miracle has not arrived. The official unemployment rate in the eastern states is now 21 percent, double that in the western states. Where obsolete or environmentally hazardous industrial plants have been dismantled, the rate of unemployment among the young ranges up to 40 percent. According to German Interior Ministry statistics, membership in neo-Nazi organizations and commission of violent crimes against foreigners and leftists is disproportionately high in the eastern states. Of the 6,400 violence-prone neo-Nazis estimated to be in Germany, more than half live in eastern Germany, even though only 17 of 82 million Germans live in the eastern states. In local elections, the Party for Democratic Socialism receives up to 30 to 40 per cent of the vote in Berlin, where so many former members of the East German establishment live. For people in their fifties and sixties, the loss of the cold war, followed by unification and the end of the GDR, effectively brought their professional careers to an end. It is no wonder that a loss of status, and economic insecurity, and old ideological commitments, all foster a desire to put the past behind or to dwell on its positive aspects rather than critically to examine uncomfortable truths.

Once a spokesperson for the East German intelligentsia, Wolf now speaks to and for many of these premature pensioners, former party members, and government officials of the East German establishment. To be sure, Americans can find other voices from the former East Germany that will sing the appropriate songs of gratitude following the great liberation from the terrible dictatorship. But we must not delude ourselves. In the midst of high unemployment and dashed political hopes, Wolf articulates the despair and the anger of a defeated communist intelligentsia and elite that may remain a part of the German political scene for some years to come. She insists on reminding us of the good intentions—while neglecting to discuss the bad intentions—of the founding generation of East German Communists, as well as of the dissident Communists who sought a different and better GDR. But the appeal to good intentions makes for bad politics, bad history, and bad literature. It is certainly no way to part from phantoms.

JEFFREY HERF teaches history at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. He is the author, most recently, of *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Harvard University Press).

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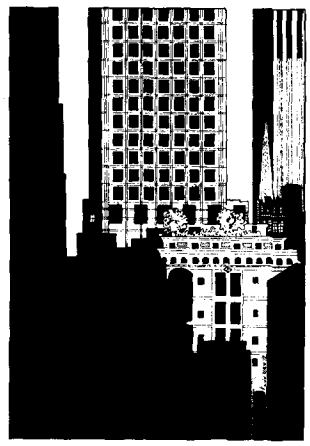
NEW YORK DIARIST

Leader of the pack

"THE ART OF THE MOTORCYCLE," an exhibition of more than 100 big bikes that has just arrived on the ramp of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, is a pop nostalgia orgy masquerading as a major artistic statement. Museumgoers will be struck by the beauty of the machines, and they will not be wrong. Many of these bikes are wonders of industrial-age elegance. But what are they doing filling the Guggenheim? At the press preview, Guggenheim director Thomas Krens explained that the motorcycle is a "perfect metaphor for the twentieth century," and therefore an honorable subject for an art museum. I see it differently. I believe that what is going on this summer at the Guggenheim has nothing to do with metaphors, those consciousness-expanding emanations that we receive from works of art, and everything to do with the media buzz that Krens was pretty sure he would unleash by setting 100-plus motorcycles on nearly as many pedestals.

AS A MUSEUM CONCEPT, "THE ART of the Motorcycle" is bottom feeding for the fashion-conscious. Krens is reassuring anybody who has ever had a guiltily ambivalent feeling about the mysterious otherness of modern art that the dream is dead and they are off the hook. Listening to Krens at the press preview—he arrived on a chopper, along with other bike aficionados who had come up from the midtown showroom of BMW, the exhibit's corporate sponsor—I knew that I was witnessing a dark day in the history of American museums. There has never been a more pathological display of institutional least-common-denominator braggadocio. This is the last word in late-'90s gonzo hedonism.

KRENS, WHO ORGANIZED THE show himself, will tell you that "The Art of the Motorcycle" is a public service—a "very serious project." If he's serious about anything, it's about fulfilling some ultimate private macho fantasy. What you have here is an exhibit that's tailor-made to delight the Wall Street Masters of the Universe who helped Krens transform the Guggenheim into an international entertainment consortium. They have brought in Frank Gehry, architect of the Guggenheim Bilbao, to redo the Wright rotunda in fun-house mirror metal. There's an S&M element to Gehry's relationship with Wright; the concrete interior is treated as a middle-aged embarrassment that can only be saved with trash-glam drag. The result is comically erotic, with those sleek, bullet-headed machines moving up the curving ramps. And Krens, who's cooked up a potential summer box office bonanza, may be laughing all the way to the bank. But what does that prove? Of course the public is going to come. A crowd always gawks when the bikers zoom into town.



"THE ART OF THE Motorcycle," Krens explains, is "a contemporary creative experience" in which "the distinctions separating content from context are blurred." That sounds familiar—rather like Rauschenberg's gap between art and life. Only, by now, the gap has become a bottomless chasm, and what was once a ramshackle neo-Dadaist insurgency has been turned into the inexorable Disneyization of a defunct avant-garde. Krens calls this "the beginning of the transformation of the cultural superstructure." That's a fancy way of saying that he's made everybody pay attention by setting the motorcycle at the heart of the museum. Whatever historical and sociological yackety-yak fills the 400-plus-page catalog, in the museum, Krens is presenting motorcycles as works of art pure and simple—as objects, that is, with their own imaginative life. And if these seductively highly polished machines are without the mystery and magic which is the essence of art? I don't think Krens cares. He knows that any criticisms will be drowned out by the it's-art-if-the-experts-say-it's-art mantra that most everybody now learns in school.

THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM HAS been lobotomized. The situation is that extreme. It's true that quasi-Dadaist events have been marketed by museums for decades. It's also true that the Guggenheim still mounts some important shows, like this winter's "Visions of Paris: Robert Delaunay's Series." And Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao—which I haven't seen—may be a great building. But there does come a time when the slippery slope gives way to the bottom of the barrel, and this month, as Krens marks his tenth anniversary at the Guggenheim, he stands before us as the first museum director who has ever subsumed all art in the art of the deal. Krens has a marketer's sensibility, a feel for international possibilities. He began with a legendary building, a world-class collection, and name recognition. He knew how to pull the right people into his art-futures game. The Guggenheim collection and name were offered to foreign governments. They paid to build new satellite Guggenheims. And the expanding empire attracted more corporate and private money.

DENNIS HOPPER, WHO WAS MOTORcycle crazy long before he directed *Easy Rider*, has said that what first attracted him to bikers was that they weren't "corporate tie-wielding execs from Wall Street." But, of course, a great many of the bikes at the Guggenheim were always rich men's toys, and there is no way that this show would ever play the Guggenheim if a lot of the "corporate tie-wielding execs" who support Krens didn't like the bike-as-art equation. Krens is telling the new museum tycoons that they don't have to care much for paintings and sculptures in order to get into this exclusive club. "An art museum's special-exhibition programming should fit into a strategic plan," Krens explains of "The Art of the Motorcycle." And what better strategic plan could Krens offer his patrons than one that begins by giving them the opportunity to symbolically trade in their rep ties for black leather jackets?

CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS ARE fuddy-duddy stuff, at least so far as Thomas Krens is concerned. Krens has become the cheerfully dark prophet of museological pragmatism. He claims to face hard facts that other museum directors avoid, when he argues that he needs glamorous international partnerships to pay the bills and that he must turn the museum into an art multiplex in order to bring in the crowds. But what some call bowing to the inevitable may in fact be a tragic lack of imagination that turns our worst-case scenario into our only option. At the press preview for "The Art of the Motorcycle," Krens spoke in that peculiarly easygoing yet insistent way of his and explained that, although he had never ridden a motorcycle down the ramp of the Guggenheim, he was not saying that he would not do so before the end of the show. Thomas Krens is a joker. But the joke is on us.

JED PERL

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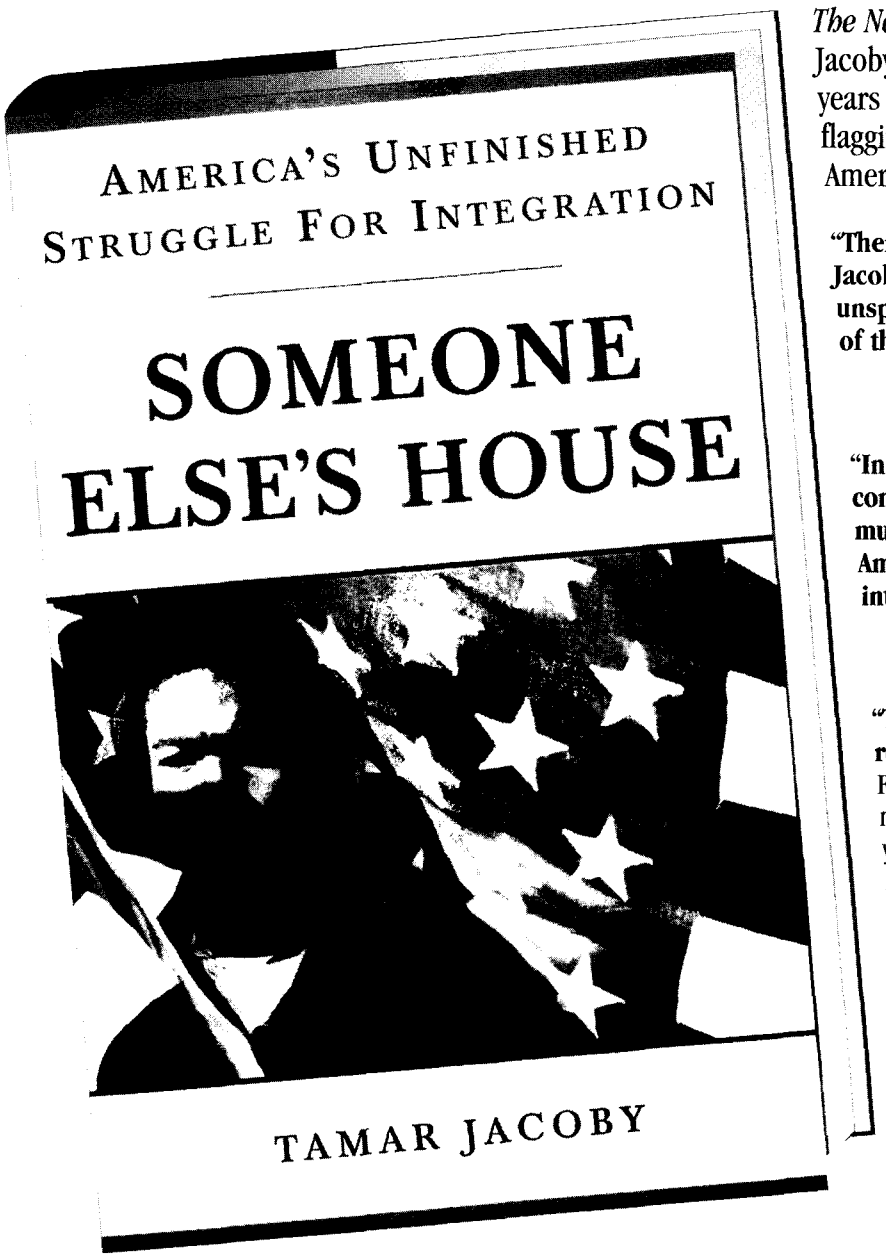

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